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A REPERTORY OF PLAYS FOR A COMPANY OF SEVEN PLAYERS AND TWO SHORT PLAYS FOR SMALLER CASTS

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CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

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FOREWORD

IN PREPARING this collected edition of his works written between the years 1906 and 1919, the author takes comfort from the thought that some of the issues raised therein are more acceptable now than they were during the period named. With satisfaction also he observes the rise of a new theater of ideas in our day, having already to its credit many noble and notable productions, wherein problems of a worthy human magnitude, attention to strict form, and a clear understanding of what is, and what is not "modernism" in art, are contributory to their success.

The first six plays in this volume were planned for a repertory company that never materialized. The scheme was to provide a vehicle for a group of seven players, five men, two women, wherein each individual should have to his credit six interesting, well-rounded parts, all widely different, yet all within the physical and psychological limits and capacities of his particular type of personality. Each play was to call for one scene only, and that the simplest and least expensive, so as to insure freedom if needs be from the commercial theater; and each should express some cosmic or pressing problem of the day, fearless of consequences, with no eye to success, and in its own significant form—that is to say, in a form that makes signs, means something, a form wherein pattern is relative to idea. The author's contribution to this scheme was to devise it, write the plays, and be in readiness to produce them. Well, here they are. And with them, two short plays of like intention and form, available for smaller casts drawn from the same company.

A brief review of the date and purpose of each play may not come amiss. *The Winterfeast* (1906) and *The Servant in the House* (1907) are complementary, the one dealing with the lie and hate in life which destroy, the other with the truth and love which preserve. The theme of *The Idol-Breaker* (1913) is freedom, in every use and misuse of that ambiguous word, from bomb-throwing to the Kingdom of Heaven. Next come three plays that may be conveniently grouped together: *The Rib of the Man* (1916), wherein war is discussed from the viewpoint of the new woman already in the world, and the new warrior coming as fast as the devil, the profit-monger, and the patrioteer will permit; *The Army with Banners* (1917), wherein the same abomination is treated from its millennial aspect, the coming in power and glory of the Lord; and, finally, *The Fool from the Hills* (1919), having to do with bread and man's hunger for it economically and sacramentally, after war, revolution, and famine have done their uttermost for the destruction of all things human. Passing to the two short plays, *The Terrible Meek* (1911) considers the blessings of empire and militarism in the light of the murder of the Son of God; while the title of *The Necessary Evil* (1912), pronounced ironically, will sufficiently indicate its drift. Chronologically, these last two occur between *The Servant in the House* and *The Idol-Breaker*. The point is made for the benefit of readers interested in the plays as a whole, and their relation to the historical events they attempt to illuminate, and sometimes foreshadow.

The author is already deeply indebted to the University of Chicago Press for the beautiful book they made out of his *Plays for Three Players*. This further volume only adds to his obligation.

The Bennett School
Millbrook, New York
June 26, 1930

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THE WINTERFEAST

A PLAY OF PRESENT MEANING, SETTING FORTH IN SIGNIFICANT FORM, BY THE AID OF SEVEN PLAYERS, THE STORY OF A WINTER NIGHT NINE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.—Isa. 28:18

THE WINTERFEAST, written during the autumn and spring of 1905–6, was licensed, produced for copyright purposes at the Bijou Theatre, London, and duly entered at Stationers' Hall, June 19, 1907.

Its first production in the United States was at the Savoy Theatre, New York City, November 30, 1908.

It was first published in book form by Harper and Brothers, New York, December, 1908.

THE WINTERFEAST

The Winterfeast is a play of Present Meaning, setting forth in Significant Form, by the aid of Seven Players, the Story of a Winter Night, Nine Hundred Years Ago.

The Time is Winterfeast, October 14, A.D. 1020.

The Place is the Homestead of Thorkel, in Icefirth, Iceland, a substantial eleventh-century Scandinavian hall of wood. The outer door is at the back. To the right of it, three long steps give access to the women's bower—an inner chamber curtained from the main hall. A high-backed ingle-seat juts out from the huge fireplace down left. There are two other exits, one above the ingle-seat, one on the other side of the room, below.

A Table set lengthwise on the right is prepared for the evening's feast. The place of honor is the high seat, back to the wall, the pillars of it curiously carved with runes. A guest seat is in readiness, should anyone come; and there are stools for the household. A small Celtic harp is by the ingle. Thorkel's byrnie, helm, and hat hang by the high seat, since he is master of the house.

The Persons represented are Thorkel, an old viking; Valbrand and Bjorn, his son and foster-son, respectively; Olaf, son to Bjorn; Ufeig, a priest; Odd, a thrall; Herdisa, wife to Valbrand; and Swanhild, her daughter. The parts of Bjorn and Olaf must be played by the same actor, for reasons that will be found in the text.

THE FIRST ACT

THE GUEST

As the curtain rises there are discovered Thorkel, Swanhild, *and the thrall,* Odd. *The girl sits on a footstool slightly to right of the old man, who is in the ingle-seat.* Odd, *on the farther side of the hearth, sits mending a sword-haft.*

Thorkel. What is thy task, thrall?

Odd. I mend Valbrand's sword, Master Thorkel.

Thorkel. So? How brake he his sword?

Odd. Nay, the sword is good enow. I do but bind it with hemp round the haft—to hold by.

Thorkel. Humph! 'Tis like Valbrand! In my day men were more fain to grip cold iron than hemp.

Swanhild. My father is no coward, grandfather!

Thorkel. I mock not thy father, child—Valbrand is mine own son; but he was ever more singer than swordsman—a dreamer of dreams, like thee, Swanhild. Well, I love him none the less for that.

Swanhild. Nor me, grandfather?

Thorkel (*patting her head*). Nor thee, little wench! But—I remember the days when men were men here in Iceland, ere the new faith came, and they fell away from Father Odin and old Thor.

Swanhild (*crossing herself at the heathen names*). Let not Priest Ufeig hear thee say as much; nay, nor God, either!

She gazes thoughtfully into the fire.

THORKEL. I fear not Ufeig. I am of the old days.

SWANHILD (*still gazing*). Grandfather, how long hath my father left off singing songs? Men say he was a great skald once.

THORKEL. Why, these twenty years—thereabout; since he wedded Herdisa, thy mother.

SWANHILD. Whom dost thou blame for that?

THORKEL. I blame—none. Such things come about.

SWANHILD. Did not my mother like song-craft in the house?

THORKEL. Maybe she liked it well enow; but—well, she wedded him, and matters changed somewhat. Sooth, there be greater need than skald-work in this world—strength, a fierce heart, and steadfastness among the folk! Ay, she made a man of Valbrand—though he *do* use hemp with his sword-haft!

SWANHILD. Didst *thou* never deal in songs, and fair tales, and such-like, in thy youth?

THORKEL (*glancing keenly down upon her*). H'm! . . . Never but once—once only, in all my life—did the skald-foam hiss in my head; and that once was once too . . . Well, I waken *that* not. 'Tis dead and done with.

ODD (*busy with the sword*). So! When Valbrand next hath need of it! . . . .

He eyes it proudly.

SWANHILD (*she has slipped from the stool and now kneels up in the fire-glow*). Never will I be wedded as long as I live! I would not take the song out of a man's mouth for all the world!

THORKEL (*laughing*). Mayhap thou mayst light on some lad of thine own mettle—some idle John-a-dreams like thyself.

SWANHILD (*radiant*). Oh, grandfather! Dost thou deem that ever such might come about?

ODD (*rising*). 'Tis done! Look, Master Thorkel. Is not that fair bound?

The child sits dreaming as ODD *holds the sword over her head.*

THORKEL. Humph! Hemp!

As ODD *hangs up the sword by the end of the ingle-seat the Warning is heard—a cry, half human, of wind and storm cleft by thunders. Smoke comes from the fire.* ODD *wheels round, scared.*

ODD. There goes Thor's devil hammer, somewhither!

SWANHILD (*crossing herself*). Ssh, Odd!

THORKEL. That was the Warning—what men call the Warning. The winter is not far off.

ODD (*standing rooted, his arms limp*). I heard a mad skald once say of the Warning, that if it fell on Winterfeast there was ill-luck a-brewing for some one.

THORKEL. Humph! Skalds! Skalds!

ODD. To-night—*is*—Winterfeast!

SWANHILD (*thoughtfully*). Mother hath made griddle-cakes.

Folk say that a maiden may light upon a lover, Winterfeast. He walks in dream, o' Winterfeast.

THORKEL. They say much that be neither here nor there.

SWANHILD. Nay, but I know the rime on't. It runs thus:

Dreaming yonder
In thy bower,
One doth wander
At the hour
Of Winterfeast:
Seek; and if thou find him,
To thee, Fate shall bind him—
As thou lookst for least.

ODD. I have heard that, too.

SWANHILD *rises with a glad little cry, and skips to the middle of the room.*

THORKEL. Whither away now, madcap?

SWANHILD. To the bower, yonder!

THORKEL. Nay, 'tis cold as death in there, child.

SWANHILD. What, shall I leave him ghosting there alone, without a welcome? See! (*She snatches up a shawl on her left.*) 'Tis mother's.

THORKEL. Ay, that bower will be the bane of thee yet!

She dances gaily into the bower. Within, she peeps out with an odd little make-believe of fear, and disappears again. The others follow her movements, THORKEL *edging round the ingle-seat to do so.*

A mad little wench! 'Tis Valbrand over again!

ODD *walks slowly to the fire. There he sinks to his knees.*

ODD. The skald said that Fate rides upon the wings of the Warning. How dost thou deem of that, Master Thorkel?

THORKEL. Fate rides another blast than yon, meseems!

ODD. And passes, likewise? Naught left behind?

THORKEL. Nay, no man knows what chance leaf may blow his way upon the breath of Fate.

There is a single knock at the door. It echoes ominously through the room. Both remain silent. Another knock.

Who is that knocks so like a thief at the door? Go see, boy.

ODD (*having started, pauses*). Shall I take weapon, Master? There hath blown no horn.

THORKEL. Do. Take Valbrand's.

ODD *does so. As he nears the door, a third knock sounds. He halts, trembling.*

Open, boy.

ODD *opens the door.* UFEIG *comes in. He is a wry old man, his face wrinkled with evil and age; his right arm hangs limp—it is withered; there is a red scar across his head, and he is a little bent. He is robed as a priest.* ODD *draws back, sword raised, facing him.*

ODD (*scared*). 'Tis old Ufeig—none but old Ufeig.

UFEIG. Yea—and thy priest!

He points to the sword with his left hand, across his body.

ODD. Thou gavest no warning, father.

The sword-point clanks mechanically to the ground.

UFEIG. No warning, eh? Oh-ho-ho! What was that erewhile? Didst not hear it—the storm-blast coming up from over the sea, with tempest?

ODD (*aghast*). Ay, Priest Ufeig, and didst thou raise yon? (*Under his breath.*) Men say thou hast a devil, and canst cast spells!

UFEIG. Ha! Then upon thee I . . .

ODD *shivers beneath that awful left hand.*

So! 'Tis well, thou learn a godly fear.

THORKEL. If thou hast aught to say, speak to *me*. He is but a boy.

UFEIG. Ah, mine old warrior's voice!

He comes down to the corner of the ingle-seat.

Thou hast no fear of me, hast thou, Thorkel?

THORKEL. I trow not! What dost thou here?

UFEIG. I have a little errand with thee, Thorkel; yea, and a little gift, too—a Winterfeast gift; but that is not from me; 'tis from—another; ay. Mine own errand with thee will I deal with first.

THORKEL. How if I will not hear thee?

UFEIG. Thou wilt hear me. Shall I sit, Thorkel?

THORKEL (*hesitating*). I know thee not, with that shaven face of thine!

UFEIG. Pough! There be one tuft left, Thorkel. Thy kinsfolk call me Priest Goat-face when they would mock me.

THORKEL (*derisively*). Ay, thou hadst more wagging at thy chin when thou wert priest of Thor!

UFEIG (*crossing himself complacently*). I am changed since.

THORKEL. Thou didst name some—some gift . . . .

UFEIG. Nay, but mine *own* errand first.

THORKEL (*roughly*). Well, come to't, and quickly. I have no time for thee.

UFEIG. I would talk of that old tale of thine which thou didst spin twenty years ago, Thorkel—that day when thou wert come from Vineland over the seas. 'Twas the only time in all thy life that thou wert known to play the skald.

A curious change comes over THORKEL.

Dost thou hear me; or (*glancing round*) do I not speak loud enow for thee?

THORKEL. Ssh! What canst thou have to say—of that?

UFEIG. All that there is to know of it, I know. Shall I now sit with thee a little?

THORKEL. Odd! Go, look an thou can spy thy master coming. 'Tis about his time.

ODD *hangs up the sword in its place.*

Take lantern with thee; 'tis dark; the light will aid him.

ODD *goes out with the doorway lantern.* THORKEL *motions* UFEIG *to his left.*

THORKEL. 'Tis the first time I have ever suffered thee within my doors.

UFEIG (*he stands warming his hands at the fire*). Tell me, doth Valbrand know?

THORKEL. He heard the tale as I spake it. He knows naught else.

UFEIG. Ah! He should be told.

THORKEL. How so?

UFEIG. Doth it not touch him closely?

THORKEL. He hath trouble enow of his own already, one way and another.

UFEIG. H'm! Folk *say* that there be more love his side of the bed than Herdisa's; and (*the other moves uneasily*)—and that she yet hath more than half a thought for that old cast-off lover of hers, whom thou . . . .

THORKEL. She hath forgot *him*, long ago!

UFEIG. The folk say otherwise.

THORKEL. They lie!

UFEIG. Eh? How that must anger *thee*, Thorkel!

THORKEL *making no answer, the other sits down, and continues, pleasantly.*

Ah! . . . .

To think, now, how we two old enemies should be sitting here so friendly, side by side, talking in thy hearth-glow this Winterfeast! And all for what? Why, because those years ago thou wouldst go match-making, and meddling with tales and such-like follies, like a skald.

THORKEL. No more of that! Come to thine errand.

UFEIG. Ay, the warfare we have had together, thou and I, days gone by! Thou wert ever best man, I will say that for thee. Three great hurts have I had of thee, all told. Dost thou remember cleaving me through the brain-pan, here? I was nigh done for: ay, 'twas a lucky miss that time.

THORKEL. 'Twas the trolls saved thee!

UFEIG. Humph! And once again, when thou brakest into my breast—here, by the heart—'tis all of a scab there yet: 'tis smarting now. This too, was thine, my withered arm (*he lifts it with his left hand*)—all thy work!
And to think, that after all this warfare there should be made a peace betwixt us, at the last!

THORKEL. A peace! Talkest thou of peace?

UFEIG. Doth not thy tale stretch so far?

THORKEL. There shall be no such thing betwixt thee and me, whiles yet I live!

UFEIG (*musingly*). Nay, then, what might hap, an Herdisa and I gat talking together?

THORKEL (*fiercely clutching him*). Thou durst not tell her!

UFEIG (*wincing*). 'Tis the sore breast, Thorkel!

THORKEL. I tell thee, thou dog, I will not have Herdisa know!

UFEIG. Off, thou fool! . . . .
She shall *not* know. We will keep it hidden among us, we three men together.

THORKEL. Three? What other man may be in this?

UFEIG. Valbrand, thy son. He must be told to-night. Doth that seem so fearful to thee?

THORKEL. Sure, 'tis hell within thee, stirring!

UFEIG. I know not that. I feel it here—at my heart.

A horn is sounded outside.

What was yon?

THORKEL. 'Tis Valbrand come home from the hills!

UFEIG (*eying him*). Well? . . . .

THORKEL. He will lose his peace forever.

UFEIG. He will hold Herdisa.

THORKEL. He will hate me for it all my days.

UFEIG. Better Valbrand hate thee, than Herdisa him. Well? . . . .

THORKEL (*bitterly*). Thou shalt have thy peace.

UFEIG. Handsel me, thereon.

They rise ceremonially to give handsel.

THORKEL. Reach me forth thy right hand.

UFEIG. 'Tis withered, Thorkel. Lift it thou.

THORKEL *does so.*

THORKEL. Peace, betwixt thee and me.

They resume their seats.

Tell me, how didst thou come to learn . . . . ?

UFEIG. Thou shalt hear all in good time. Ssh! Valbrand! . . . .

VALBRAND *enters, closely followed by* ODD.

VALBRAND. Come in, boy. Ah! Such a blustering day as it hath been! (*He hangs up his cloak.*) Where is Herdisa?

ODD. She is over to neighbor Gunnhild's with a bake of griddles.

VALBRAND. Ho, Winterfeast, eh? *Thou* wilt see thy skin full to-night, I warrant thee! Ha-ha-ha! Well, I blame thee not. Come, get thee round to the byre; there is much work yonder, and I would have all done up ere the feast. I will but thaw my bones, and join thee, presently. Good lad!

He watches ODD *out; then comes down to the ingle.*

Well, old father and how is Winterfeast using thee, eh? How now! Priest Ufeig! Father . . . .

UFEIG. Come, friend, speak to thy son.

VALBRAND. Friend! Did I hear thee call him *Friend?*

UFEIG. Yea, or thou hast no ear. Harkee, Valbrand! We have made peace. How doth that like thee?

VALBRAND. Wouldst thou have truth?

UFEIG (*drily*). Yea, I love truth.

VALBRAND. Why then, Priest, I like it marvellous ill! Methinks a peace with thee must needs have some huge lie at bottom on't!

UFEIG (*inexpressibly shocked*). Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh! (*Nudging* THORKEL.) Come, begin, warrior.

THORKEL. Sit thee down, Valbrand.

VALBRAND *brings a stool from the table and sits.*

My son, carry thy mind back a twenty years. Dost thou remember that day I sailed for Vineland—I and thy foster-brother Bjorn?

VALBRAND. I am not like to forget.

THORKEL. Two things there were that drave me forth that day. Of the one, thou knowest: Iceland was become a nest of niddering priests; I had no call to stay here. There was yet other reason for my going.

VALBRAND. And what was that?

THORKEL. It was thou, my son—yea, thou. Thou wert sick to the heart for Herdisa: and naught mightst thou do all the day long for love of her but sing thy songs and woo her with fair words. But she— Do I pain thee, son?

VALBRAND. 'Tis in the tale, father. Say on.

THORKEL. She would not look on thee. Skalds and skald-songs were but a mock to her; she would have none but a warrior for her mate, she said; and ever as she spake she turned her thoughts upon thy foster-brother.

UFEIG. Ay, all the dale knew that!

VALBRAND. Bjorn spake scarce a word to her at any time.

UFEIG. That was for thy sake, Valbrand. He was a fool.

THORKEL. The hour was come to test thee. I hated that she and all the folk should call thee coward. That year the tidings came of Vineland, westaway yonder, over the seas. I fitted out a ship; and when all was dight and fair I called a feast, and cried for men to join me. Thou alone stoodst niddering; thine eyes were bent upon Herdisa. She saw thee not; for Bjorn set sail with me. (*Passionately.*) My son, why wilt thou still sit silent? Hast no blood? Dost thou not remember that night of the Feast, and Herdisa's dealing with thy foster-brother?

VALBRAND. I remember!

THORKEL. Stood there glorying in Bjorn, whiles all around the people scoffed at thee! Gave him the very ring from off her arm, and pledged her love to him, unsought, unasked . . . .

UFEIG. Ay, that was the point—*Unasked!* Folk afterward said that it was a bold matter for a maid to give her heart, *unasked!*

VALBRAND (*darkly*). Bjorn took the ring in silence. He spake no word.

UFEIG. Ay, a fool!

THORKEL. That night mine eyes dreamed blood; but whether for love of thee or hate of Bjorn I know not. On the morrow we sailed.

VALBRAND. Why wilt thou wake that old dead bitterness? What part hath it in the Peace ye twain have set up together?

THORKEL. My son, if I tell thee, thou wilt . . . . Nay, I can say no more! Tell him thou.

UFEIG. That will I, and swiftly:

Harkee, Valbrand! Out of all that company of men which fared forth to Vineland that day, only two remained alive to tell the tale.

Thorkel. Two?

Ufeig. Yea: Bjorn, left in Vineland, yonder; and thou, here in Iceland.

Thorkel. Humph! He will be dead by now.

Ufeig. Humph! That would leave only thee. Anywise, only thee to tell the tale in Iceland.

Valbrand. Well, he told it! 'Twas a mighty tale, well spoken, no songman though he be. I hear the echo of the people's praise yet ringing in the rafters whiles he spake it!

Ufeig. I was not by, but heard tell thereof. Did it not shame Bjorn somewhat?

Valbrand (*hotly*). The shame was Bjorn's own!

Ufeig (*quietly*). Ay, so thy father said.

Valbrand. There was Bjorn's own word against him!

Ufeig. Ay, what word was that?

Valbrand. Thou hast heard. That he spake by mouth of my father.

Ufeig. What spake he by—mouth of thy father?

Valbrand. Why, the mocking message he sent Herdisa! (*Fiercely.*) What hast thou to say to that?

Ufeig (*slowly*). I have but two things to say to that, Valbrand. First, that message won for thee thy wife—

Valbrand. Ha!

Ufeig. And second—it was a lie.

Valbrand. Priest!

UFEIG (*striking like a serpent*). Ask thy father.

> VALBRAND *fears to look at his father. When he does the worst is confirmed.*

VALBRAND (*gasping*). Father! . . . .

THORKEL (*in a low, broken voice*). I did it for thee, my son.
Hast thou no word, Valbrand? 'Twas for thee. Thou wert the child of my blood.

VALBRAND. Yea, thy blood is in me. Mind me not of that.

THORKEL. Thou shalt curse me for it, if thou wilt. My son, curse me.

VALBRAND. Curse thee? Nay, that I cannot, either. I never learned. I am no warrior.

UFEIG (*cheerfully*). And now, how best to hide this matter from Herdisa!

VALBRAND. What, I! I help to hide it! Help him keep his lie!

THORKEL. Valbrand! Thou wilt wreck her soul it thou speak!

UFEIG. Psh! He will wreck us all!

THORKEL. It will cost thee so little, son, not to speak; naught it hath cost me.

VALBRAND. It will cost me a lie! Dost thou hear? A lie!

UFEIG. What hath she had in her heart for thee all these years but a lie? Her change from Bjorn to thee was marvellous swift!

VALBRAND. I have won her a thousand times since then!

UFEIG. Then keep her, thou fool! Keep her!

VALBRAND. How? By a lie?

UFEIG (*testily*). Nay, by silence! Thorkel, why didst thou breed such a fool? He angers me. . . . . Think of thy child!

VALBRAND. Oh! I am blown hither and thither, like a leaf!

He sits staring before him. They watch him closely as they speak.

THORKEL. The priest saith truth, son—Silence: that is the best rede. Why break her peace?

UFEIG. The lie is not even thine.

THORKEL. 'Tis so long ago. He will be dead by now. Count him dead by now.

UFEIG. In *thee* it will be *no* lie.

THORKEL. *He* was thy greatest fear, all said and done!

UFEIG. 'Tis a kind of truth—in thee.

THORKEL. Why, we have made too much on't. Harkee! Bjorn is dead; my heart saith so; hate hath slain him many times. 'Tis known to none other in the world, save thee and me and old Priest Ufeig here.

VALBRAND (*suspiciously*). And *thou*, Priest? What wilt thou do?

UFEIG (*moving to* VALBRAND'S *left*). Thy father, there, hath handselled me peace. Handsel me, thou also, and no man shall know aught from me.

VALBRAND. So: lie engenders lie!

UFEIG. 'Tis but thy first, Valbrand.

> VALBRAND *rises and takes* UFEIG'S *hand, which the latter points to.*

VALBRAND (*tonelessly*). Peace betwixt thee and me.

UFEIG. Now is there high oath sworn betwixt our houses. If aught should hap to strengthen your hands hereafter I stand free. Betwixt us there lies a great peace!

VALBRAND. Let me not find thee here when I come back from the byre.

> *He moves heavily up the stage. Once he sways slightly, like a drunken man. At the door he wavers, but leaves silently.* UFEIG *watches his exit with a deep smile.*

UFEIG. That, then, is mine own errand with thee. But I have more: a gift for thee—another's, not mine own.

THORKEL (*absently*). Ay, thou saidst so erewhile.

UFEIG. There is a ship newly come to Reekfirth, up in the north yonder. I was there two days ago. Humph! a fair ship once, maybe, but now much weathered out on the high seas. Men said there was some oath aboard her, that either she should touch Iceland by Winterfeast or be torn to rags.

She was torn to rags; but (*he pauses*) she reached Iceland.

THORKEL. That was well sworn. Brave men aboard her, belike.

UFEIG. Yea. I spake with one of them. He was a stranger. He would be here—in these parts—by Winterfeast.

THORKEL (*casually*). Ay, there be many that come and go, in Icefirth.

UFEIG (*with quiet intention*). Ay, and yet others, that go, and come again.

THORKEL'S *attention is arrested.*

THORKEL. A stranger to thee, sayst thou. Did he know *thee*, in any wise?

UFEIG. He made no sign thereof; and I have been shaven now nigh—twenty years.

THORKEL. Hast any inkling of him?

UFEIG. Now thou askest, mayhap there was some slight echo in the voice which. . . . Eh?

THORKEL. What! Big and deep-baying, like the shout of thunder?

UFEIG. '*Twas* much like thunder, but held low a little, as before the storm. He sent thee this gift.

He gives it to him.

THORKEL. A sea-shell: 'tis naught but a sea-sh . . . .

UFEIG. What! Hast thou known its like before?

THORKEL. Its like—ay; its like!

UFEIG. Not hereabout.

THORKEL. Nay, but in Vineland yonder, over the great sea!

UFEIG. Humph!

THORKEL. What spake the stranger?

UFEIG. For thee, but four words.

THORKEL. And they?

UFEIG. "Greetings to thee, skald."

THORKEL. Skald! (*He rises, white with rage.*) Blind that I have been! Thou hast already . . . .

UFEIG. The peace, Thorkel! Remember! The peace!

THORKEL *sinks back, impotent with rage.*

Now at the last do I deem that thou hast paid in full for my cloven brain-pan: ay, and for the scab here, likewise.

I have one hurt left.

He touches his arm. In the doorway he has a final sting;

A joyful Winterfeast to thee!

He goes out into the darkness. THORKEL *is left staring at the shell.*

THORKEL. 'Tis Fate! 'Tis Fate! Perchance, even this very night . . . . I never feared him till now.

There will be naught in his heart but hate for me—naught but hate. "Skald," he said: Yea, "Greetings to thee, skald!" Ay, Fate! Fate!

HERDISA *enters. She is wrapped in a long cloak. She takes it off as she speaks. She is strangely excited.*

HERDISA. Thorkel! Thorkel! Art thou there, Thorkel?

THORKEL. Is it thou, Herdisa? Where hast thou been all this while?

HERDISA. Out in the dark there. Ay, in the dark. Thorkel, are we alone?

Thorkel. Herdisa! My daughter! Why, how pale thou art; and thy hand—how cold: 'tis almost . . . . Come, sit thee down.

He helps her to the stool.

Ay, and trembling all over, like a winter-driven sea-bird!

Herdisa. 'Tis the ice-blast and—the storm out yonder!

Thorkel. 'Tis calm again now; the storm hath passed.

Herdisa. Mayhap it but holds off for a while!

Thorkel. There is more in thy mind than thy speech bewrays. Tell me, Herdisa, what hast thou seen out yonder?

Herdisa (*her eyes dilating*). I have *seen* naught!

Thorkel. Then what might have happed to fright thee so?

Herdisa. It was—a voice!

Thorkel (*startled*). A voice! Tell me thereof.

Herdisa. I left neighbor Gunnhild's an hour ago. I was down by the foreshore yonder; there were folk stand to watch the great ships sail forth and away down the fiord.

Thorkel. Thou art always thither these days.

Herdisa. Yea, and on a night like this . . . .

Thorkel. I know, I know; the seas chime well with thy restless heart, Herdisa.

Herdisa. There was I, to-night. Then came the Warning. Didst thou hear it? From over the far seas it came, howling like the Wives of Death! I never heard them cry so clear before! As I fell back, before the blast, I felt the trailing of their skirts upon my face, smelt the loathly blood-scent of their breathing.

Louder and louder the great cry rose, blended with thunders; mine ear-drums trembled. Then—amidmost of the rack there came forth a mightier sound than all. It was as the voice of one long dead!

Thrice he cried. His words: "I have lost thee, lost thee, lost thee!" And as the Warning died away in long-drawn sobbing beyond the uplands, methought I still might hear an echo of that anguish: "Lost thee! Lost!"

She sits gazing darkly before her.

THORKEL. Maybe 'twas but thy fancy—thy fevered heart, and the tempest yonder . . . .

HERDISA. So deemed I as I groped my way hitherward through the rising mist; but on the crag-brow yonder, lo! another voice to mock me. It cried: "Where art thou now, Bjorn? Bjorn Asmundsson, where art thou—now?"

Her voice has sunk to a whisper. There is a short, tense silence.

THORKEL. How if he were nigh, indeed? What wouldst thou do?

HERDISA. 'Tis a dead man we talk on.

THORKEL. What wouldst thou do an he came hither, to this house, to-night?

HERDISA (*slowly*). What would I do? What wouldst thou have me do? Welcome him with smiles and blushing gladness, like a bride?

THORKEL. Welcome! Ay, that likes me. It would disarm him somewhat—welcome.

HERDISA. I meant not thy meaning; yet thou art right; it likes me also. It had been a fair beginning!

THORKEL. Yea, best rede every way; he should find thee proud; there would be a kind of pride in that.

HERDISA. He should not have found me lacking therein!

THORKEL. Then for the rest— Silence, as to things gone by.

HERDISA. Ha, that were thy counsel— Silence!

THORKEL. There is but little help in speech. Things get said which were better left to die; and, after all, 'tis twenty years now, and . . . .

HERDISA. 'Tis not so long but I remember!

THORKEL. Why, then, how wouldst thou deal with him an he came?

HERDISA. Flout him back overseas again, even as he flouted me that day in Vineland!

THORKEL. Nay, not that way, not that way!

HERDISA. What more bitter hate wouldst thou devise?

THORKEL. None! Thou wouldst but play *his* tune with *thee!* Hate would there be in his heart; and hate would he look for . . . .

HERDISA. And why not hate for hate?

THORKEL. Yea, but buried deep in thy heart, unspoken!

HERDISA. He should have found me bitter, both ways!

THORKEL (*excitedly*). He will but look for that! Look to find thee bitter! He will come here, guile on his tongue, and . . . .

HERDISA. *Will! Will* come! Talk we not of dead men, and mouthless voices of the storm?

THORKEL. Not so, by the blood of Baldur! Hearken! And hold thine heart like iron!— Bjorn Asmundsson comes hither tonight, indeed!

HERDISA. Ha! 'Tis a lie!

THORKEL. I would it were so!

HERDISA. What! The truth, then!

THORKEL. Ay.

HERDISA (*slowly rising, an awful fire in her eyes*). Ah! Thou pitying! After all these years! At last! At last!

THORKEL. Herdisa! Herdisa! What wilt thou do?

HERDISA. Why, dight me, and make ready to give welcome to thy foster-son!

SWANHILD (*within*). Grandfather! Grandfather!

THORKEL. Peace! The child!

HERDISA *stands as though carved in stone.*

SWANHILD *re-enters from the bower.*

SWANHILD. Grandfather! I have seen him!

THORKEL (*lost in his own thoughts*). Hast thou, child?

SWANHILD. I fell asleep, and saw him walk in fantasy.

THORKEL. Ay, ay, a dream.

SWANHILD. Some dreams be more wide-wakeful than we look for!

HERDISA. Whom dost thou talk of, little one?

SWANHILD. Hath he not told thee? Why, a lover! He came, as folk say spirits rise and look on those they love!

HERDISA. How! As from the dead?

SWANHILD (*gravely*). *'Tis* a kind of death—slumber!

HERDISA. Nay, then, let him not wake from that great silence! Let dead souls bide where they be and vex us not!

SWANHILD. Nay, that is unkindness of thee, mother!

HERDISA (*embracing her*). How, to *thee?* I would not hurt my little ewe-lamb for all the world!

SWANHILD. A lover should be welcome!

HERDISA. What, thou too! Then, welcome shall he be, even though he come this very hour! We will make ready for him now.

SWANHILD (*radiant*). Mother! Dost thou mean it?

THORKEL. Have a care, Herdisa!

SWANHILD. Tush! 'Tis but a game, grandfather. I know 'tis but a game; and yet, if it should prove indeed . . . .

HERDISA. Therefore, set thou one more platter on the table.

SWANHILD (*gleefully doing so*). Yea, yea, mother! And a knife, and a cup to drink from! . . . .

THORKEL. Have a care thy game end not in mockery, Herdisa!

HERDISA. 'Tis that end I look for. Next, drag thou the guest seat yonder. Let it face the high place where Thorkel shall sit, that the guest may be seen of all! He shall not lack for welcome an he come!

VALBRAND *re-enters as* SWANHILD *does so.*

SWANHILD (*joyfully*). Welcome to Winterfeast, father!

VALBRAND. Ay, ay, little bird! Hello! The guest seat! Who comes?

SWANHILD. Ah! 'Tis a secret! My mother bade me set.

VALBRAND. So? Wife . . . .

HERDISA. 'Tis Winterfeast. Best be ready.

VALBRAND. Dost thou look for a guest? Dost thou?

HERDISA (*hesitating*). None that I know on, for sure.

VALBRAND. Why, then, set for shadows! Tush! Take away!

ODD *comes in. He stands up at the door.*

THORKEL. Perchance, if one came, a little welcome . . . .

VALBRAND (*bitingly*). I crave no merry-making here to-night! Dost *thou?* Take away!

ODD. So please thee, master, there is a man coming up by the dale there.

HERDISA. How—a man!

She shrinks into the ingle. VALBRAND *notes the movement.*

VALBRAND. Humph! Leave the seat. Who may it be?

A horn sounds outside. THORKEL *rises.*

SWANHILD. Mother! . . . .

> VALBRAND *glances from her to* HERDISA. *The latch of the door is tried.*

VALBRAND. Odd!

> ODD *opens the door. There enters a tall, handsome, bearded, somewhat grizzled warrior. He bears a naked sword. Striding to the middle of the room, he regards* VALBRAND *quizzically.* HERDISA *and* THORKEL *are hidden in the ingle.*

A stranger!

SWANHILD. Not he!

BJORN. Is there harborage here for a wayfaring guest to-night?

VALBRAND. Comest thou in warfare or in friending?

BJORN (*whimsically*). As thou wilt! I have a sword here, an thou wilt fight me!
Am I not welcome? I had thought to be looked for.

VALBRAND (*gasping*). I know not yet what name to call thee by.

BJORN (*handing him his sword*). Thou wilt find it nicked on the haft there.

> VALBRAND *reads, and drops the sword.*

VALBRAND. 'Tis that I gave . . . .

BJORN. Ah! My foster-brother! My foster-brother!

VALBRAND. Thou art much changed. Thy beard—thy . . . .

BJORN. Well, hast no welcome for me? There is little in thy face as yet, meseems!

VALBRAND. Nay, I am glad enow. 'Tis but dazed—here! (*He presses his brow.*) After all these years, we—we did not look for thee. We . . . .

He stands fascinated by the guest seat.

SWANHILD. 'Twas well my mother bade me set!

BJORN. What! Herdisa! Ay, she would remember me! Where is she? . . . . Ah, thou! How fair, how fair to find—thee!

They stand looking at one another.

Hast thou no word of greeting for thine old friend?

HERDISA. Is all well with thee, Bjorn Asmundsson?

She leads him to the guest seat. The curtain falls at this point, which is the end of the First Act.

THE SECOND ACT

THE BREAD OF SINFIOTLI'S BAKING

The Scene remains unchanged. The stool has been moved back again to its place at the table. Bjorn's *sword still lies on the floor.*

Supper is over, and the ale-joyance begun. Thorkel *sits in the high seat; opposite him, in the guest seat,* Bjorn. Herdisa *occupies the upper end of the table;* Swanhild, *the lower.* Valbrand *is to the right of his father.*

Valbrand. More drink there, Odd!

Bjorn. Valbrand hath mended! Time was he had no more head for the mead than a babe. He hath played toss-pot enow to-night for us all!

Valbrand (*hotly*). I have drunk no more than thou!

Bjorn (*jovially*). Not! Why, thou hast the throat of Hecla! Here, boy! He shames me!

Holding out his cup to Odd. *The boy replenishes it.*

Now! I will drink thy blood dry ere I cry me beaten by thee!

Valbrand. Take thou care I drink not thine first!

Bjorn. A challenge! I take thee! Ply him, thrall! Herdisa, here, shall sit and judge betwixt us. Wilt thou, Herdisa?

Herdisa. What, sit and weigh you twain, the one against the other?

BJORN. Ay, if thou wilt. So, the cups be full! To it, brother!

VALBRAND. Nay, by Heaven! I will not drink with thee! Weigh him with some other!

BJORN (*half angrily*). Ho-ho! Foster-bro . . . .

SWANHILD (*simultaneously*). Guest! I pray . . . .

She runs to his side and turns, facing her father.

My father drinks but little at any time.

BJORN (*after a moment's irresolution*). Well, I will not press thee, for I see thou art the old Valbrand—moody as ever!

VALBRAND. Ay, moody, call it!

SWANHILD *joins* ODD, *and whispers a word about the mead-bottle. Her back is to* BJORN *for a while.*

BJORN. Herdisa, thou hast become good huswife since I saw thee last. Never have I tasted feast more welcome. And thy mead! (*He drinks.*) Ah! 'Tis a ripe brew! (*Drinks again.*) And thou thyself art grown more fair than ever!

HERDISA. 'Tis the gladness of seeing thee again, Bjorn Asmundsson.

BJORN. I would fain think so; and, indeed, thy kindness makes me bold. I would crave yet more of thee by-and-by.

HERDISA. Thou shalt have yet more than thy craving.

BJORN (*indicating* SWANHILD). Yea, but by-and-by, dost understand? By-and-by. Tut! 'Tis secret yet! There be one too many of us here to speak out now.

VALBRAND. Ha!

BJORN. What ails him now? More moods, eh? Well, I say naught. 'Tis the skald's way, I guess.

VALBRAND. Do not thou call me skald!

BJORN. What else shall I call thee, if not skald? I deem a man may call cat *cat*, and thee, skald!

SWANHILD. My father hath not sung in this house a twenty years. My grandsire said so.

BJORN. What! Is that so, Thorkel?

THORKEL. He hath had other work to do.

BJORN. Nay, but thine *own* work, lad! Herdisa, what hast thou been doing with him all these days?

VALBRAND (*savagely*). She hath made me a mighty warrior, like thee!

BJORN. What—*Thou!* Herdisa, is this truth?

HERDISA. Like thee—ay.

BJORN. Nay, I meant not that; but . . . . A *warrior! Valbrand!*

HERDISA. How else might we keep alive thy memory among us?

SWANHILD. 'Tis truth, Bjorn. My father hath done many brave deeds! Look thou, yonder is his sword. ODD, bring it.

He does so. BJORN *takes it.* SWANHILD *stands between them.*

ODD. See, Master. With this he hath slain many a man.

BJORN (*holding it out, arm's length*). Humph! 'Tis a good blade! This might kill a man, well! Eh! What is this? On the haft, here?

ODD. 'Tis hemp to hold by. 'Twas I who . . . .

BJORN (*outraged*). What! Hemp! Hemp to . . . .

SWANHILD (*quickly*). 'Tis gentler holding, Bjorn.

VALBRAND *has risen, cup in hand.*

BJORN (*perceiving*). Ay, ay, ay; a good device!

VALBRAND *drains his cup and dashes it angrily to the ground. He then moves unsteadily toward the ingle.* BJORN *follows the action with surprise.*

BJORN. So, so, so, warrior!

VALBRAND (*turning*). How! Doth that bite thee so?

BJORN. What, that thou art a warrior, Valbrand?

VALBRAND. Yea, I know thy deeds shone fairer, when I was but a skald!

BJORN (*gently*). Did they so? 'Twas the skald that I loved, brother.

VALBRAND. Ha! 'Tis no odds!

He goes to the ingle and sits down, lost in bitter thought.

BJORN. Herdisa, thou hast done ill to let my foster-brother change thus. Nay, I say it; and, sooth, ye both be dear to me.

HERDISA (*with quiet irony*). Thou wert too far away for me to seek thy counsel.

SWANHILD *takes her father's place at the table.* ODD *puts by the sword.*

BJORN. I loved those songs of Valbrand's. What wanted he with deeds and rage and hatred—yea, and blood upon his hands? 'Twas the fire that spake in him! Why sought he blood to quench it?

SWANHILD. Were my father's songs so dear to thee, Bjorn? I never heard my father sing.

BJORN. Nay, an he have forgot the craft, how should he teach them thee?

SWANHILD. Hast thou remembered any of them?

BJORN. Yea, and sang them many a time to—to one I loved in Vineland.

A silence. Then HERDISA *speaks curiously.*

HERDISA. So, thou hast had company with thee, out yonder?

BJORN. Yea, but I had meant to tell thee of that when thy little maid was abed; and yet . . . .
Well, I see not why . . . .

HERDISA (*hiding some emotion*). We wait to hear thee.

BJORN. First, I must tell thee, there was a certain fair woman yonder—the daughter of the Red Folk's king. 'Twas for her sake I gat left behind in Vineland. Well, Thorkel will have told thee that; 'tis not for me to vaunt myself . . . .

HERDISA. *Vaunt* thyself!

BJORN. Why, hath he not told thee?

HERDISA (*with veiled irony*). Yea, he sang thy praises!

BJORN. Tut! What other could I do? 'Twas naught! By Valhal! we had known too sore the ruthless hatred of those fierce, red-faced men the while they held us captive in their booths. One by one they took us, every other day, and slew us to their gods—ay, every other day, one man! Last of all, Thorkel and I alone remained. Then came that woman in the night, unbound our bonds, and led us to our ship. Aboard, we strove to bring her with us; but she slipped our hands and fled into the woods. What might I do? I could not leave her there to taste the bloody fury of her kin. I left a word for thee with Thorkel, lest . . . . I followed her. I had not been a man else.

When I had found her, and would return, there were the Red Folk pressed upon the shore, and the ship set sail without me.

HERDISA (*unbelievingly*). Nay, then, why not vaunt thyself indeed! 'Tis a gentle tale—told most like a skald! Thorkel had not half thy gift the day he spake it.

BJORN. Tush, tush! 'Tis naught! Speak not of it!

HERDISA. So, then, thy songs in Vineland . . . .

BJORN. I come to that.

To the north we fled, through many perils. 'Twas but that once I saved her life. Mine she saved seven times, all told. Afterward, I lived with her a twelvemonth; and then she died. She was exceeding fair, and loved me much. By her I had . . . .

He breaks off, lost in some deep thought.

HERDISA. Yea, what hadst thou by her?

BJORN. Why, all the joy and comfort of my many years out yonder!

HERDISA. By the—red woman?

BJORN. By the red woman—ay. . . . . (*To* SWANHILD.) Tell me, child, hast thou e'er been spoken for in wedlock?

SWANHILD. I am too young. My father could ill spare to lose me yet awhile.

BJORN (*thoughtfully*). A man might ill spare that at any time—to lose his child!

SWANHILD (*naïvely*). I am useful about the house here.

BJORN. I warrant thee! So, then—no lover in thine heart, as yet?

SWANHILD. In mine *heart?* Nay, I said not that.

BJORN (*disappointed*). What! Thou hast? Already?

SWANHILD. I know not how to answer thee. I ne'er set eyes upon him in my life, and yet I looked for him to-night!

BJORN. How! Ne'er set eyes upon him, and . . . .

SWANHILD. 'Twas in the bower yonder that he came!

BJORN. The bower!

SWANHILD. Yea, showed himself in dream to me!

BJORN (*his anxiety gone*). Oh—a dream! A dream!

SWANHILD. Yea, but true for all that! I saw him plain before mine eyes, as—as I see thee now! . . . . Oh, Bjorn! . . . . I never noted it before! . . . .

BJORN. Why, how now?

SWANHILD. He was as like to thee as . . . . Yea, an thou wert younger, and thy beard away . . . .

BJORN. What! Like me? Child, thou movest me!

SWANHILD. He might have been thy very . . . .

Bjorn. Say! Quickly! How looked he?

Swanhild (*eagerly*). Tall and fair, smooth-faced like a lad, with most kind eyes! They shone like stars! There was a kind of king in his eyes!

Bjorn (*uplifted*). By Valhalla! yea, a king indeed!

Thorkel. What, is that thy thought of thyself, Bjorn?

Bjorn. I think not of myself!

Thorkel. "Like thee," she said.

Bjorn. Ay, but . . . .
'Tis strange! Most marvellous strange! The child hath had the gift upon her, sure. Here in thy house, thou saidst? A dream? . . . . Art thou certain it was—a dream?

Swanhild. I slept—and he came!

Bjorn. Why, then, he may come again, and thou—awake! Harkee, Swanhild! 'Tis secret yet; but . . . . Mayhap I will play the wizard for thee, by-and-by; yea, mayhap find thy lover for thee, by-and-by.

Swanhild. Bjorn! . . . .

Bjorn. Remember that I told thee.

Swanhild. What! Find my lover! My lover!

She turns a rapt little face toward the audience.

Herdisa (*as from a trance*). That same red woman of thine, had she any liking for thy skald-songs?

Bjorn. What— Valbrand's? *She? She* like them? Forsooth, the poor soul scarce gathered a word of mine all the year I lived with her. We spake two tongues, she and I.

HERDISA. Waste labor then, methinks, singing songs to deaf ears!

BJORN. I found ears for *them*.

HERDISA. Mayhap thou dost rate thy voice too highly! They were songs of love, or such-like, if my memory fail not.

BJORN (*gravely*). It fails not, Herdisa. Those songs were made for thee.

HERDISA. Ay, but sung by a skald, indeed!

BJORN (*glancing toward* VALBRAND). A great one!

That minds me. Naming *skalds*, foster-father, *thou* hast been too long silent. I would have a word with *thee*.

THORKEL. Eh! What! With me, Bjorn?

BJORN. Yea; but first, thy cup stands empty there. Thou wert not wont to sit and let the mead-foam flood idly by thee; and (*significantly*) I am thirsty, too.

THORKEL (*abstractedly*). Ay, ay; fill up, boy.

ODD *does so*, BJORN *remarking meanwhile:*

BJORN. There doth not seem to be the same drinking done in Icefirth as aforetime.

HERDISA. We have changed in many things.

BJORN. So! Now, Thorkel; first, this cup with thee; and then shalt thou speak forth boldly, like a man, and tell how it came about that thou turned skald!

HERDISA. Yea, the hour is ripe for that!

On the word "skald" THORKEL *puts down his cup untasted.* BJORN *does the same.*

BJORN. Why dost thou not drink?

THORKEL. I have no head to drink to-night.

BJORN. What, what, what! Thou, too!

THORKEL. I am not so able as I was. Come, let us gather round the fire yonder. (*Rises.*)

BJORN. Not till thou hast told thy tale, father! Come! Let the drinking be; but thy tale, at least!

THORKEL (*fiercely*). Why wilt thou mock so? The priest hath told thee all, already!

BJORN. Not a word! He told me but plain this—that thou wert skald. He would tell no more.

THORKEL. What! No more than that! Thou hast heard no more than that?

BJORN. Naught. Thou shalt tell me now.

HERDISA. Ay, tell him!

THORKEL. Why do I stand babbling here? How! Tell thee tales! Tales! Why should I tell tales to thee? I am no skald!

BJORN. Why, the priest said that thou . . . .

THORKEL. The priest! Ha! . . . .
Enow! I join my son yonder.

He makes his way toward VALBRAND.

BJORN. Things be changed in Icefirth, indeed!

THORKEL (*turning*). Take them as they be—in silence.

HERDISA. And why, forsooth, may not our warrior be enlightened? Is it not time? Sure, 'tis a brave tale enow *that* he asks for, and touches some of us, full closely.

THORKEL. He is our guest; let that suffice him. If he like it not— H'm!

He goes to the ingle seat and sits to VALBRAND'S *left. The others watch him go.*

HERDISA. I fear we do not make thee feel thy welcome, Bjorn.

BJORN. Nay, an it come to that, *thou* hast been most kind.

HERDISA. It pleases thee to say so. But come now, my kinsmen be too moody to drink. How if I do taste one cup with thee? What sayest thou? Shall we—pledge loves together?

BJORN. That will I, all my heart, Herdisa!

HERDISA. Why, then, all thy heart, thou shalt. Lo, now (*pointing to* THORKEL'S *untasted cup*), Thorkel hath furnished forth a cup for me; and thine own is yet undrained. Wilt thou reach me yon?

He reaches over the table to do so.

Hold! 'Tis a foolish question; but . . . . Whither hath the ring gone from off thine arm—that which once I gave thee? Hast thou lost it?

BJORN. Nay, not lost; but . . . . one I love . . . .

HERDISA. I understand. So! Thy pledge!

BJORN. Why, then, thus, Herdisa: "Heart's love to thee, and faith till death. So pledge I thee—brother's wife." (*Drinks.*) Thine. Why dost thou tarry?

At the word "death" her eyes have filled with some strange, prescient horror.

HERDISA. 'Tis but a word I halt for. I know not how to pledge thee.

BJORN. Pledge from thine heart, Herdisa.

HERDISA. Why then: "Whatso lies in mine heart for thee, that do I pledge thee, Bjorn Asmundsson."

BJORN. That was well said.

HERDISA. Amen.

A single knock at the door. They listen.

BJORN. Do outlaw men go free in Icefirth nowadays? Was any horn blown?

HERDISA. None, to mine ears.

The knock is repeated.

VALBRAND. Give bidding, thrall. We be four men here.

ODD (*calling*). Come thou in an thou mean peace!

The door opens and UFEIG *enters. He closes the door quietly behind him and stands regarding the company with a smile.*

BJORN. What! The priest with whom I spake two days ago!

UFEIG. Mine eyes be half blinded with the dark out of which I come, and yet I know thy voice. A second greetings to thee—*stranger!*

BJORN (*cordially*). The like by thee, with thanks for thy service done me.

UFEIG. 'Twas no service. Well, now . . . .

He glances round the room.

HERDISA. Valbrand, art thou master here, or no? Or is it thy wont to let thy guests talk pleasantly with thy foes and thou look on? Up, if thou hast blood in thee, and drive yon old gray wolf from thy doors!

BJORN. How! Foes? . . . .

UFEIG. Nay, then, perchance he hath not told thee yet. Humph! 'Tis pity! Thou wilt ne'er speak kindly to me, Herdisa, till thou know.

HERDISA. I should like to hear that would make me talk kindly with thee!

UFEIG. Why, thou shalt have thy liking, and welcome. There is peace betwixt thy kinsmen and me.

HERDISA. Thou art a liar to say so!

UFEIG. Ask Thorkel. Thou wilt scarce give the lie to thy good old Thorkel.

VALBRAND (*roughly*). The peace hath been handselled and made firm. There is no more to say.

HERDISA. Why, then, I will say no more! Natheless, my thoughts may still work a little within me! But ye brave men will scarce care to hear a woman speak forth her heart full flood, when ye have, all so gently, undone the hate of years! (*Suddenly, passionately.*) Tell me but one thing. Was this peace with our bitter foe brought about by the warrior of you twain or by—the skald? Ye answer not.

UFEIG. Sure, it was brought about by the *skald.*

VALBRAND (*furiously*). Dost thou say by me?

UFEIG. By the skald, I say. Is not that sooth? Or shall I speak more plainly?

THORKEL *has risen. He restrains his son.*

Doth that suffice thee, Herdisa?

HERDISA. The skald—ay!

BJORN. I am not bound, Herdisa. If aught I may do will avail . . . .

HERDISA. Peace! I crave not help of thee! (*To* UFEIG.) Say, what devil hath urged thee hither now?

UFEIG. Unbelief, Herdisa; unbelief like thine, when first our peace was told thee. My seven big sons at home yonder, they doubted, also, when I brake the tidings an hour ago. What proof might I offer them? None! None at all save my bare word, which they . . . . Well, I say no more of that.

My son, Helgi, found grace first . . . .

SWANHILD (*involuntarily*). Black Helgi! . . . .

UFEIG. Yea, thou wilt remember Helgi, Swanhild. . . . . He said that if our peace meant ought at all it should be made sound and binding, beyond all doubt; something should be devised, said he, to lock our friendship fast; and he hit upon a rede which pleased us all. Thereupon, am I come hither.

Now, thou wilt scarcely guess mine errand here, Herdisa! . . . .

She remains stubbornly silent.

BJORN. Some money-gift, an I take right measure of thee.

UFEIG. She craves not help of thee! But thou art wrong. Thorkel, what sayest thou?

THORKEL (*gloomily*). Our help, at need, thou hast, by the peace.

UFEIG (*pleasantly*). Nay. Try thou, Valbrand!

VALBRAND. I will not guess thy riddles.

UFEIG. Then must I needs call "dog," and bark, too! Harkee! I come a-wooing hither. . . . .

There is a vague sensation among them.

Nay, nay. Tut! Not for myself—I be well-nigh past such foolery—but for Helgi, my son.

BJORN *starts up in anger.*

How? Doth that startle *thee*, also?

BJORN (*white hot*). I will but say one word to thee: Whom doth thy son seek to woo in this house?

UFEIG. Doth it touch thee so nearly? Lo! then look beside thee, stranger.

SWANHILD *already clings to* BJORN. *There is a confused noise of all talking together and as sudden a reaction into silence.* THORKEL'S *voice tails off last.*

THORKEL. Damnation! This hath gone too far!

VALBRAND. By Heaven! There shall be an end of it! Thrall! Reach me my sword! . . . .

UFEIG. Hold thy hand! Lest I smite *thee!*

VALBRAND *falls back.*

(*Deeply.*) Ay, even where it will hurt thee most.

BJORN. What! With that puny arm of thine?

He points to the other's uplifted left arm.

UFEIG. Nay, with this other; 'tis withered, but the deadlier of the twain.

BJORN. Ha-ha! A wizard!

UFEIG. Psh! (*To* VALBRAND.) Well, what is thine answer to my kinsmen?

VALBRAND. Herdisa, one word with thee alone; and afterward . . . .

HERDISA. Too many have been spent already. 'Tis but one deed wanted here, and that scarce a man's.

BJORN. I hold with thee, Herdisa!

VALBRAND. Why, then, come what may, this to thee and to thy kinsmen. Take back my flouting and scorn! Ay, and look thou out for warfare, Priest, from this day forth—thou and thy seven great sons. As for Black Helgi, tell him from me I take his mock, and this world is not big enow to hold us twain henceforward. When thou shalt see his carcass tossing for fish-meat in yonder fiord, thou shalt guess my meaning! Till then let him mock still!

So! The peace is broken! Now do thine uttermost; and hell grip thee!

After a moment UFEIG *says slowly.*

UFEIG. That uttermost will I do, Valbrand, and *now!*

VALBRAND. I will not be by the while!

THORKEL. There is a better way; bide a little. . . . .

VALBRAND. Bide thou! I leave my shame with thee!

He rushes out into the night. UFEIG *turns and watches him off.*

UFEIG. Now will I spread light among you.

THORKEL *interposes with a voice of thunder.*

THORKEL. Hold! I have a word to say! Have *I* yet broken peace with thee?

UFEIG. Thy son is one with thee.

THORKEL. Have *I*—yet—broken peace with thee?

UFEIG. The peace was made with both, and he hath broken it.

THORKEL (*grimly*). There shall be made amends. Thrall, go bring thy master back again. Tell him I, his father, bid him.

UFEIG (*quietly*). I should say *crave* him, Thorkel.

THORKEL. Say what thou wilt, but bring him.

As ODD *reaches the door he adds:*

Say—all is well. I would have him here, and quickly.

ODD *goes out.*

UFEIG (*eying* THORKEL). *Is* all well?

THORKEL. It shall be made so. Thy kinsmen would not take thy word. How if I came yonder to thy hall and made all clear?

UFEIG (*eagerly*). Wilt thou go? (*His eyes flash triumphantly toward* BJORN *and* HERDISA.) Now?

THORKEL. Now. Get thee forward.

UFEIG (*promptly*). I will.

He goes toward the doorway; but THORKEL'S *next remark makes him turn inquiringly upon the threshold.*

THORKEL. Child, bring my helm hither, and old War-Flame.

SWANHILD brings them from their peg by the high seat.

Thy father will be home within the minute. Tell him what hath passed. For thyself, fear not, child.

She goes into the ingle-place.

UFEIG. Why War-Flame with thee, Thorkel?

THORKEL. 'Tis my wont to bear my sword in hand when I go about to stablish peace.

They go, warrior and priest, together.

BJORN (*crossing to* SWANHILD). Tell me, child, how long hath yon priest vexed this house?

SWANHILD. 'Tis of long standing—our quarrel with him. I have heard my grandsire say that it goes back to the old days, when he was priest of Thor, here.

BJORN. What, he! Sure, yon was not old Ufeig!

SWANHILD. The same. Didst thou not know?

BJORN. Ufeig! He is much changed!

SWANHILD. Folk say he can change shape at any time.

BJORN. Nay, but to mock my brother so! Ay, and Thorkel, too! Ufeig!

HERDISA. Doth mocking move thee so much, Bjorn?

BJORN (*sitting in the ingle*). Gods! Ay.

HERDISA. Leave us, Swanhild; I would speak with our guest alone. Go, seek thy father.

SWANHILD *goes out.* HERDISA *walks slowly to the side of the ingle-seat before speaking.*

Thou art right; it hath a cruel sting—mocking!

BJORN. Why will they suffer it? An it were my case . . . .

HERDISA. Yea, how wouldst thou deal with mockers?

BJORN. There should be but one doom, and that a swift one!

HERDISA. Why dost thou harp so on that word?

BJORN. What word, Herdisa?

HERDISA. Why, *death.* May there not be hate without slaughter?

BJORN. Nay, but for such an one as Ufeig . . . .

HERDISA. Leave Ufeig. Let us come to *thee.*

BJORN *looks up inquiringly.*

Let me sit beside thee a little.

BJORN. Do, Herdisa.

He makes room for her on his right.

'Tis not the first time we twain have sat together in this ingle. Dost thou remember, Herdisa?

HERDISA. I remember. But in those old days we were for the most part silent; thou wouldst ever go red when I spake to thee, and glance aside; thou durst not meet mine eyes. Ay, there was little said betwixt us.

BJORN. There was reason for that, Herdisa. My brother . . . .

HERDISA. I learned thy reason sure enow—later!

BJORN. Well, those days be dead now.

HERDISA. For thee, ay. Ha-ha! How thou wouldst ever redden in thy face and turn away thine eyes!

BJORN. I was but a boy. Look into them now.

HERDISA (*faltering*). Not so; I fear to see the mocker there, Bjorn Asmundsson.

BJORN. Mocker! How so? What mocker?

HERDISA. Why, thou! Thou, mocker! The mocker of women!

BJORN (*stung*). Ha! (*Gravely.*) Thou dost wrong me to the quick, Herdisa. Thou shouldst best know that. For the love of one woman in my life have I ever held all women most dear.

HERDISA (*laughing*). For thy red woman, ay! Well, I know not of that. Maybe she had some witchcraft to keep thee true.

BJORN. I owe her much. I would talk to thee of that.

HERDISA. I know not that I care to hear thee.

BJORN. It touches both of us. She hath left a balm for thee and me, that dead woman; it may heal much pain—yea, bind our lives forevermore.

HERDISA. Why wilt thou still talk of thy woman? I seek no balm of her! Why dost thou shirk the thought unspoken in our hearts? Come thou to the matter that stands like a great fire between thy soul and mine!
Why wilt thou not speak? Or . . . . hast thou perchance forgotten?

BJORN. I forget naught of what hath been, yet—it shames to speak of it.

HERDISA. Ha! 'Tis good thy *shame* is known to thee!

Bjorn. I know no shame as matters stand now, only shame if I speak—shame to both of us, Herdisa. Why shouldst thou seek to loosen the long silence of years? The past is dead; let it be buried among us now.

Herdisa. Answer me one thing: Why wilt thou not speak of it?

Bjorn. Why ask? There is that therein forbids me speak.

Herdisa. 'Tis *that* I would have thee say!

Bjorn. How shall I; since . . . .

Herdisa. Since . . . . ?

Bjorn. Since thou art wedded to my foster-brother!

Herdisa. Ah! *That* is thy taunt! Because I wedded with thy foster-brother! Make thy shame mine! Mine! (*Passionately.*) Shall I tell thee why I wedded him? Shall I? Shall I?

Bjorn. Too much hath been said already! Herdisa . . . .

Herdisa. *Hearken!* Thou shalt not stir till thou hast heard the last word. Have I borne this burden all these years, to shirk it at the last, when I have thee here, alive, to listen? I trow not! Hearken:

It was thou whom I loved those days we talk on, Bjorn Asmundsson. I loved thee with all my heart. . . . .

Bjorn. Herdisa . . . .

Herdisa. God's blood! I need not hide it! All the dalesfolk knew it, for I was but a young, glad girl, wearing her heart upon her sleeve for all the world to see! Thou wert ever in my thoughts; thou wert my warrior, my king! For thee I lived, I breathed! I watched thee all about, whereso'er thy footsteps led thee; thou wert my day, my sunshine; without thee all was night!

Nay, thou shalt hearken . . . .

Thou wert a silent man in those days, naught like thy foster-brother—all songs and fair speech! Deeds were thy life—warrior deeds—and even for that I loved thee. He sought me ever with his songs and plaints and tears, but I heeded him not; I had naught but mockery for him then. *Thou* wert by, with thy mighty deeds—thou, who hadst never so much as named the name of love within mine ear! . . . .

BJORN. But in mine heart . . . .

HERDISA. Yea, in thine heart. So deemed I then—in thine heart! And for that I waited—waited, hungering, day by day. Thou wouldst not speak. Methought it was love of thy foster-brother, and pity of his sorrow, that kept thee wordless . . . .

BJORN. And so it was . . . .

HERDISA. And even for that I hated him the more. So the days wore on, and still the same sweet singing from Valbrand; still the same unbroken dumbness from thee.

BJORN. Herdisa! Thou tearest at mine heart!

HERDISA. What of mine? Dost thou remember that night of the Great Feast, ere thy going away? Dost thou? (*Smiting her brow with clenched fist.*) It hath been branded here in my brow, night and day, for twenty years!

BJORN. Ay, and in mine!

HERDISA. Lo, there, the mighty chieftains and the thronging of the folk! . . . .

BJORN. The flashing of great battle-axes and shields upon the walls! . . . .

HERDISA. Swords aloft, like deadly flames of war! . . . .

BJORN. Beakers afoam, with gladness of the mead! . . . .

HERDISA. There was a cry rang forth from the heart of man to man! . . . .

BJORN. And the joyous thunder of great voices lifted loud in praise! . . . .

HERDISA. Yea, and above them all, thou, Bjorn Asmundsson, standing foremost, the king of all those folk! Thou! Thou! Whom I worshipped! And straightway, as I watched thee, there slipped from off me all of maiden shame, and I stood forth, naked love, before thine eyes! What recked I of the folk? What recked I that a maid must needs be spoken for, not speak herself, unasked! There wert thou, my king: I glorying in thee! And I spake!

BJORN. The music of that speech hath never left mine ears!

HERDISA. Nay, there thou liest! What of thy red woman yonder, overseas?

BJORN. I have loved none other woman in the world, but only thee, in all my life!

HERDISA. Lie upon lie! Why didst thou stand dumb when I spake my love before the folk?

BJORN. I am no skald. My love for thee wrought dumbness.

HERDISA. Yet lies! What love for me that day upon the shores of Vineland, when Thorkel left thee?

BJORN. 'Twas then I loved thee most of all!

HERDISA. Lies! Lies! Lies! They thicken in the air about us! Wilt thou say next that thou wert dumb for love that day?

BJORN. Not so; I bade old Thorkel bear thee one poor word of comfort from me then.

HERDISA. Ha! 'Tis of *that word* I would have thee speak!

BJORN. How shall I, and thou my brother's wife?

HERDISA. I wed him not till Thorkel spake thy message!

BJORN (*dazed*). My message . . . .

HERDISA. Thy message! Ha! The echo had scarce died away from Thorkel's lips ere I pledged me to thy foster-brother!

BJORN. How hadst thou heart?

HERDISA. As thou hadst heart to send thy message!

BJORN. Herdisa, art thou mad, or hath my message . . . .

He pauses, with a sudden thought.

Say what was it. Hast thou remembered?

HERDISA. Ay.

BJORN. Give it shape that I may know it once again.

HERDISA. 'Twas brief; 'twas bitter. I have not forgotten. 'Twas but *one word* came back to me from Vineland.

BJORN. And that? . . . .

HERDISA. Unasked!

There is a long silence. Then BJORN *speaks with an awful slowness.*

BJORN. So: that one word hath broken both our lives.

HERDISA. It hath mended Valbrand's.

BJORN (*pursuing his own thought*). 'Twas a little word to do so great a deed!

HERDISA. Valbrand hath holp it, somewhat.

BJORN (*with bitter irony*). What, my foster-brother! Nay, then, 'tis *yet* too little, standing thus alone, with none but him to help it! It may not breed, alone, with none but him to help it! Methinks it clamors aloud for yet one other word to match it!

They have both risen.

HERDISA. Bjorn Asmundsson!

BJORN (*thundering*). Hearken to me!

HERDISA. I will not hearken to thee! What wilt thou dare to say?

BJORN. To tell thee first the lie within thy heart!

VALBRAND *has entered unperceived.*

What love hath thine been for my foster-brother? Hath he been Bjorn to thee? What is thy child—his bastard? 'Twas I to whom thou pledgest thyself! Thy love is mine—mine! Not his! That slave hath shamed thee!

HERDISA (*seeing* VALBRAND). Valbrand! Dost thou hear?

BJORN (*turning*). Ha! Is it thou?

VALBRAND (*hoarsely*). What hath she been told?

BJORN (*going up above him*). Not all, yet, Valbrand; not —*what is in thy mind!* Ah! Well, I leave that thee to tell, an thou be man enow! I have but *one word* for thee, foster-brother: 'tis my *message* to thy soul, *one word*—unloved!

VALBRAND (*gazing at his wife*). Herdisa! . . . .

BJORN (*hissing the words quickly*). What hast thou been to her this long while, eh? Dost thou deem thyself fit mate for Herdisa? *Thou!* Thou! When she had once known *me!* By the blood of Baldur, thou hast been but her bedfellow all these years, and she thy wanton—not thy wife! The rest is mine! So! I go north o'er the bridge yonder, to Reekfirth, an thou wouldst hear me further!

He goes out. VALBRAND'S *eyes have never left* HERDISA. *She points to* BJORN'S *sword on the ground.*

HERDISA. Take *his* with thee also. He hath left it. Deal —justly with him.

VALBRAND. My gift to him. Where is mine?

HERDISA *points without looking. He gets it from the ingle-seat.*

HERDISA (*to herself*). Ay, there is none other end to hate.

VALBRAND. And which is he on whom thy hate hath lodged?

HERDISA. Go learn his name.

VALBRAND (*looking at the swords*). God's blood! I will!

He goes out quickly. She goes to the ingle and sits in the fire-glow there.

HERDISA. Bjorn shall pay for that bitter word!

There comes an utter blackness. There is a sound like the throbbing of a heart.

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Second Act.

THE THIRD ACT

THE DRINK OF THE RAVEN

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. Drum, drum, drum! Like a heart throbbing. Drum, drum! Drum! And out of it HERDISA *is heard speaking in the darkness.*

HERDISA. Yea, it hath been a great darkness, all these years; but now 'tis lifted. No more burden! There shall be peace to thee at last, O my soul!

The light slowly returns and reveals her still sitting in the ingle.

So, Bjorn Asmundsson! 'Tis fully paid between my soul and thine, in the ending! Ay, sure, all will be done by this. Perchance, even now, thy spirit . . . . Yea, there is a haunting in the air about me!

And out yonder . . . . Ay, stiff and stark, so they lie, the silent dead!

She imagines the horror before her.

That will be a long sleeping for thee, Bjorn! That rest have I brought thee; 'tis a love-gift for thee. Mine.

How found he the might to do it, my . . . . thy slayer? Perchance some quick stealth, and then aloft, thus, with his hand, and so . . . .

She gazes upon her own hand, fascinated, and wipes it with the other.

'Tis like fire!

That I should watch thee, sleeping, thus! *Bed-fellow* was thy word. Well, I have made bed for *thee*, this once! How dost thou like thy bride, dead man? Doth she daze thine eyes? Thine . . . . eyes . . . .

Ha! How thou wouldst redden at my speech and turn away thine eyes! I said so to thee long ago. . . . .

How strange and like twin stars they were! A king's might have looked so! . . . .

Oh! Oh!

Why doth Valbrand tarry? 'Tis over now! All ended now! Why comes he not, red-handed from the slaughter, to do his vaunting? A man might well brag of such!

He hath done his deed at last—Valbrand! I mocked him once for no warrior! He hath plucked out that sting forevermore!

Why doth he not come? Ha!

The latch of the door is heard. Swanhild *comes in. She looks about, surprised, then steals to the ingle and peeps round playfully.*

Thou, Swanhild! . . . .

Swanhild (*mimicking*). Nay, but Goblin Hob! What, not know thine own chick, motherkin goose?

Herdisa. I thought not to see thee, child. (Swanhild *sits at her knee.*) I had forgotten thee.

Swanhild. Ay, thou art a sorry mother to me!

Herdisa. I will be kinder to thee henceforth!

Swanhild (*patting her cheek tenderly*). Ah, thou, thou!

Herdisa. Nay, thy little hand; 'tis . . . .

Swanhild. What of my hand?

Herdisa (*gazing curiously*). 'Tis like thy father's!

SWANHILD. They say I feature him.
I could not find him, mother, though, forsooth, I cried him a many times aloud in the night there.

HERDISA. He hath been in again. He followed after—him that came to-night.

SWANHILD. Ay, where is our friend? I was about to ask of him.

HERDISA (*lost in her own thought*). Who?

SWANHILD (*surprised*). Bjorn.

HERDISA. He lies . . . . He lies not in our house to-night. He hath left us. Thy father hath holp him a little on the road he goes by.

SWANHILD. I am sorry. Most kind he was to me. How chanced it that he left us?

HERDISA. There was a word came for him, and he went forth.

SWANHILD. At whose summoning?

HERDISA. Why, 'twas of none in this house.

SWANHILD. What! Ufeig's? . . . .

HERDISA. Nay, a greater than his, though, sooth, the priest hath much power o'er our house to-night, meseems!

SWANHILD. Pf! I heed *him* no longer. My grandsire hath assured me. Which way went my father and his foster-brother?

HERDISA. Up north, o'er the bridge, to Reekfirth.

SWANHILD. Ay, the way he came. 'Tis an evil night for travelling. *Left*, beyond the bridge there, is but ice and desolation, an they miss the straight path.

HERDISA (*suspiciously*). Didst thou go that way to seek thy father?

SWANHILD. Nay, by the foreshore I. 'Tis all thick mist and darkness beyond the bridge.

HERDISA (*her eyes dilating*). Ay.

SWANHILD. How soon ere Bjorn come back again?

HERDISA. *Bjorn* come back! How should *Bjorn* come back? . . . . unless thy father, yonder . . . .

This new thought deepens more and more.

SWANHILD. How strange thou art! Thou saidst erewhile my father did but help him a little on the road.

HERDISA. 'Twas that I *looked* for. He should be back by now. Why doth he not come?

SWANHILD. Mayhap the mist hath stayed him.

HERDISA. Not thy father! What hath the mist to do to stay thy *father?*

SWANHILD. Pray God it stay them both, and bring Bjorn back again—and soon!

HERDISA. Peace child! If thou wouldst pray, pray for thy father, that *he* come.

SWANHILD. Yea, and for Bjorn, too!

HERDISA. For thy father, I say! Ha! Who was that?

They have both risen. SWANHILD *goes over to the guest seat and faces the door.* THORKEL *enters, sword in hand.*

SWANHILD. 'Tis my grandsire come back from Ufeig's.

THORKEL *advances grimly to the middle of the hall.*

HERDISA. Well? . . . .

THORKEL (*to* SWANHILD). Thou art free from Helgi, child, henceforward. He hath made peace with me.

HERDISA. More peace! How?

THORKEL. He mocked too far. I slew him.

SWANHILD *shudders, and crosses herself involuntarily.* THORKEL *watches her gravely for a moment, then hands her his sword.*

Lay it by, Swanhild. It needs rest.

SWANHILD *puts it back, by the high seat.*

Where is Valbrand?

SWANHILD. He hath seen Bjorn on his road. Bjorn hath left us.

THORKEL. Is that so, Herdisa?

HERDISA. 'Twas so purposed.

SWANHILD. How if Helgi's brethren meet my father on his way home! . . . .

THORKEL. They will vex not. To-night they walk in hell with Helgi.

SWANHILD. And Ufeig! . . . . What of Ufeig?

THORKEL. I have no longer power o'er him. He lives. Howbeit, he hath no son from this hour forth.

An agonized cry is heard far off. They all listen intently.

What was yon?

HERDISA. 'Twas naught! I heard no cry!

SWANHILD. Sure; 'twas the sound of some soul in pain!

HERDISA. Get thee to bed, child, quickly! Nay! Go!

SWANHILD. Good-night, motherkin.

HERDISA (*absently*). Good-night.

The cry is repeated nearer the house. SWANHILD *turns round a scared face. Her mother makes a gesture for her to go. She does so.*

THORKEL. 'Tis the second time. What doth it mean?

HERDISA. I cannot say—for sure.

The cry again.

THORKEL. 'Tis near the house; it comes hither. I will go see.

HERDISA. Stay! Thou shalt know soon enough!

Someone stumbles heavily against the outer door, moaning piteously. A moment later ODD *enters, bearing* BJORN'S *sword. Staggering forward, he casts it down between them.* HERDISA *follows the action with a look of horror.*

ODD. Herdisa! Mistress! Oh!

A sickly pause. HERDISA *points to the sword.*

HERDISA. Tell thou thy tale!

ODD (*gasping*). Up on the bridge yonder, o'er the river . . . . 'Tis swollen in the gully down below . . . . My master and the guest that came to-night! . . . . Oh! . . . .

THORKEL. Ay, what of them?

ODD. It will move thee nigh to death, mistress! Woe is me!

HERDISA. In God's name, tell all plainly!

ODD. I found him not—my master—when first I sped me forth to do old Thorkel's bidding, though sooth, I hunted up and down the dale hallooing loudly. I gat no answer, save the angry growling of the sea, the thunder of old Kaldalon to the north there, and the distant sound of mighty Glamu, clashing and clamoring beyond the southern hills.

Hither and thither, stumbling, at last I won unto the uplands; and ere I was well ware of it—for the mist 'gan thicken about me—I was now come nigh upon the bridge. It swayed and creaked upon the hempen bands.

Scarce was I there when one rushed by me, raving as one distraught. I hailed him, but he answered not, yet, sooth, his weapon grazed me in the side here as he passed. And now was he come, maddening, upon the bridge. Then a thought smote clear upon me that there was none other than my master, and Valbrand sure it was.

But by now was I mindful of another with him. He was ahead; he was already upon the bridge. Whiles I stood wondering who that other might be, for I could see naught plainly, my master hailed him by his name. He called him Bjorn. It was the guest that sojourned here to-night.

Then . . . . then . . . .

THORKEL. Say on! Say on!

ODD. Ere I might move they were at each other's throats! I heard no cause of quarrel—no word was spoke between them; only, I heard the bitter shriek of blade on blade, as there they dealt with death, amid the bickering mist!

THORKEL. How! Were both slain?

ODD. Nay . . . . One remained.

Herdisa. And he? . . . .

Odd. Whiles I stood gasping for fear, that one lifted high the corpse of him that he had slain and, with a cry, cast him into the torrent that foams beneath the bridge. One moment I caught the shadow of his falling, against the white froth of the flood, and next he hurtled swiftly for the fiord.

Herdisa. And he that remained? . . . .

Odd. Then, first, he noted where I stood, and hailed my name. His voice . . . .

Herdisa (*quickly*). Ay, what of his voice?

Odd. Never heard I sound like that before. 'Twas like a beast in pain.

Herdisa. What said he?

Odd. He cast me his sword, and with it a word for thee: "Go tell thy mistress he whom she hates is dead."

Herdisa. Whom I hate!

Odd. Ay. So saying, he fled like one bewitched; and ever as he fled I heard him crying out: "My brother! I have slain him! Accursed! Accursed!"

Herdisa. And which was he—the murderer? Answer, quickly! Bjorn or Valbrand, which?

Odd (*in an agony*). I could not see; the darkness pressed upon me! Believe me, I could not see; and yet . . . . and yet . . . .

Herdisa. And yet? . . . .

Odd. Lo, his sword there lies before thee!

Herdisa *turns away her face, shuddering.*

THORKEL. Bring hither.

ODD *does so.*

The haft unbound. 'Tis a warrior's.

He hands the sword back to ODD, *who gazes upon it, fascinated. After a pause* HERDISA *speaks with dreadful quietness.*

HERDISA. Then I have lost my mate. The father of my child is dead.

Placing the back of her hand to her eyes, she stands so for a few seconds.

THORKEL. And my son.

ODD, *whimpering like a stricken beast, crosses to the hearth and lies there face downward. He takes the sword with him, and afterward leaves it there.*

This is justice. The deed was mine.

HERDISA (*tonelessly*). Not so. *I* killed him.

ODD *whimpers.*

(*In an awful whisper.*) How shall I answer for him?

THORKEL. Herdisa, stand not so. Let forth the bitter word of thy sorrow, weeping. It will ease thee a little.

HERDISA. What word is left me? Our house hath lost its tongue. Valbrand the skald is dead!

ODD *whimpers.*

Ay, a great skald men called him! That was long ago—ere he married me! He sang no more from that day forth. I killed him *then*. How shall I answer for him?

A great skald! I have heard men say that it was his word, when it mounted high upon the wings of song, that maddened them on to whatsoever deeds they did! The maidens lilt his love-runes to this very hour. For me he made them. I shall hear them till the day I die.

(*With a sudden gust of passionate repentance.*) Ah! What be all ye mighty warriors beside such an one as he? And what should I be—I, his wife—that helped him nothing in his song? Fierce-hearted, a viking's daughter, I learned my lesson from such men as thou, old Thorkel. I would have made him a thing of blood, like thee; and lo, the music of his life is fled forever! How shall I make answer? How shall I make amends?

(*She continues with feverish agony.*) A great skald men said! A great skald! That shall be said again of him, in Iceland! He shall have a great skald's burial! Yea, songs shall be cast up high above the piling of his barrow, and the minstrels shall make music about his bones! Ye men of blood count yourselves loftier than common folk; and when ye meet your bane, the death-song for you foams and surges like a huge sea-storm; but what cry in Iceland shall compare with that which shall arise and echo down the days for Valbrand the skald, the mighty skald, whom I have murdered!

A low whimper from ODD.

Thou hast no answer. Hast thou naught to say?

THORKEL. Naught. I am dumb.

HERDISA. Ay, thou art right. No help in words. 'Tis the woman's heart, to *speak* her grief!

THORKEL. I do as I may do. I know no other way.

HERDISA. Truth; thy way is best. The hour calls for it!

THORKEL. How? What way is that?

HERDISA. Why, the warrior's. (*To* ODD.) Say! Which way fled he?

ODD. Up over the bridge, to northward.

HERDISA. Turned he right or left?

ODD. Left, over the bridge, toward Dranga and the hills of ice.

HERDISA. What! 'Tis desolation that way, and vast walls of pathless rock!

THORKEL. How shall that profit thee aught?

HERDISA. *How?* And thou a warrior! Lo, now, yonder thy deed awaits thee!

THORKEL. What deed, Herdisa?

HERDISA. Why, the avenging for my husband's blood!

THORKEL. What, avenging! Dost thou say avenging? Against Bjorn?

HERDISA. What other man but him!

THORKEL. *I!*

HERDISA. Who else but thee!

THORKEL. I will lift no further hand against him!

HERDISA. Not though he hath slain thine own son!

THORKEL. I take that blood upon myself! Bjorn shall not die by me!

HERDISA. Thou wilt not?

THORKEL. There is that, unknown to thee, forbids me slay him!

HERDISA. How! Is it fear?

THORKEL. Ay, if thou wilt, call it fear.

HERDISA. And thou art he who but this very night hath slaughtered all the sons of Ufeig! Seven lusty men against thee, and thou didst prevail o'er all! Nay, then, though thou slay me, I will speak! Niddering!

THORKEL. Hold thy peace!

HERDISA. Niddering, I say!

THORKEL. Herdisa! (*Then, conquering himself.*) Come what may, thou hast mine answer: I will not venture forth to-night for Dranga and the hills of ice. Ay, come what may.

HERDISA (*slowly*). Then must I seek some other aid.

A single knock at the door. UFEIG *enters, hell smoldering in him.*

They are about to speak, but the priest interrupts them.

UFEIG. Yea, doth it start you to look on me again? Lo, I come fresh from the havoc of my sons, and I know my danger! But I bring you news!

THORKEL. We know thy news. Thou wouldst tell of the slaying up on the bridge yonder.

UFEIG. What, reached thee already! It hath sped fast. I deemed none so swift as I.

HERDISA. And now thou art come to vaunt it over us.

UFEIG. Doth it touch thee so closely that I may *vaunt* it over thee?

HERDISA. It had need; but I am iron against thee.

Ufeig. Thou wilt not be iron when thou hast heard more.

Thorkel. Priest! I will not have thee . . . .

Ufeig (*flashing dangerously upon him*). Nay, I am free of thee!

Herdisa. Let him void all! What I have lost, I have lost!

Ufeig. Was, then, that dead man so dear to thee, Herdisa?

Herdisa. Ay—seven sons to me, in one!

Ufeig (*another flash at* Thorkel). Yea, so much! Well, thou wilt ne'er hear his great voice again!

Thorkel's *attention is vaguely stirred.*

Herdisa. Ay, it made more music than thy seven oxen yonder!

Ufeig. What! *Sing* to thee, did he? *He!* Well, I know not of that! Mayhap he made song enow for thee, by stealth, long days ago, when his brother was not by. Men heard him not!

Herdisa. He did all openly! His life was clear!

Ufeig. Then was thine a lie! Thou wouldst ever cry the warrior in him, not the skald!

Herdisa. Ay, mock me with that!

Ufeig. Then what wilt thou say when thou shalt learn of one more lie, which even now thou shalt . . . .

Thorkel ⎫ *together* ⎧ Priest! . . . .
Herdisa ⎭ ⎩ I will not hear thee longer!
'Tis past bearing! Odd! Odd! To the foreshore yonder! Come!

UFEIG. Nay, ere thou find his corpse, hear me . . . .

THORKEL *holds him back with iron hand.*

HERDISA (*going through the door*). Odd! Odd!

THORKEL (*sternly*). Follow thy mistress! Quickly!

ODD *runs after* HERDISA. *When the door closes* THORKEL *loosens his grasp with a fling, which sends the priest spinning over to the fireside.*

UFEIG (*swiftly, venomously*). Our peace is broken! Thou canst not stay me now!

THORKEL (*passionately*). 'Twas for their own mocking I slew thy sons!

UFEIG. They cry for vengeance still!

THORKEL. Are they not avenged enow already?

UFEIG. How so, with all thy house in peace here, and thy lie untold?

THORKEL. Thou hast had blood for blood!

UFEIG. How blood for blood?

THORKEL. I deem my one son Valbrand is sufficient recompense for all thy seven!

UFEIG. How should there be recompense in *Valbrand?*

THORKEL. Why didst thou come here vaunting? Hath not Bjorn slain him?

UFEIG. *Valbrand* slain! . . . .
Ay, ay, ay! Ay, ay!

THORKEL *follows his curious change of manner with a dawning realization of what it may mean.*

THORKEL. What is in thy mind? Didst thou see the fight yonder?

UFEIG. Every stroke.

THORKEL. What didst thou see?

UFEIG. All.

He breaks into a high-pitched, mirthless shriek of laughter.

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! My seven big sons be avenged!

He makes for the door.

THORKEL. Hold! Where wilt thou go?

UFEIG. *Not* after Herdisa! Ha, ha, ha! I do no more, henceforward! I leave all to Fate!

THORKEL. What dost thou mean?

UFEIG (*flashing round at him*). Harkee! Herdisa yonder goes forth to find her corpse! Repentance works in strange ways. She bewails the loss of—*Valbrand!*

THORKEL. And so she doth, most bitterly!

UFEIG. Yea—*Valbrand being dead!* How if it had been otherwise?

THORKEL. (*His face betokens his thought.*)

UFEIG (*at the door*). Lo, now, thou hast slain my seed, and I am already old! Yet have I gendered me of somewhat among thy kin that shall live! I shall not die childless!

He goes out, still with the same mirthless laughter in his throat. THORKEL *wakens as from a dream.*

THORKEL. Swanhild! Swanhild! Hither, quickly.

SWANHILD (*distantly*). Is it thou, grandfather?

THORKEL. Ay; come! (*He crosses toward the fireplace.*)

> SWANHILD *enters. Her hair is unplaited. She has on her light underdress only.*

SWANHILD. I should have been asleep, but I sat dreaming yonder. What wouldst thou?

THORKEL. Tell me, child, when Bjorn went forth to-night, bore he *his own* sword with him, or no?

SWANHILD. I was not here to see.

THORKEL. Did I not bid thee stay until thy father . . . .

SWANHILD. My mother bade me follow Odd, and find him.

THORKEL. Did she so? Then, mayhap, she hath not told thee . . . . Thou dost not know . . . .

SWANHILD (*pointing across him*). See, grandfather, there is Bjorn's sword yonder—on the ground there. The haft hath no binding.

THORKEL. Ay, 'tis Bjorn's *sword*, right enow. Fetch me my helm, Swanhild—nay, my hat.

> *She runs to the high seat to do so.*

Ay, Bjorn's *sword;* but . . . .

SWANHILD. And thy weapon, grandfather?

THORKEL. Nay, 'tis a gentler errand this time—one of peace, indeed! 'Tis to bring back . . . .

Ay, all may yet be well if . . . .

> *The sword fascinates him still.* SWANHILD *gives him his hat.*

SWANHILD. Whither shall I tell my mother thou hast gone, an she ask me?

THORKEL. Say I go *north, left by the bridge, for Dranga and the hills of ice.*

SWANHILD. Grandfather! Not to-night!

THORKEL. Do my bidding! Stay till she come.

He goes out. SWANHILD *stands lost in thought.*

SWANHILD. 'Tis some secret in the air. They seek to keep it from me. First, father; then, mother; and now, my grandsire! A secret, and from me.

Yea, and Bjorn, too! *He* named a secret! We spake about my dream, and . . . .

"Mayhap I will play the wizard for thee by-and-by; yea, find thy lover for thee by-and-by!" Those were his words —Bjorn's words. Jesu, recompense him!

If it should be so!

A horn sounds outside. She trembles with fear and joy.

Heaven, but it hath a sweet sound!

After a short silence the latch of the door is lifted and OLAF *enters. He is clean-shaven, and clad in byrnie and shining viking helm with eagle feathers. He pauses on the threshold.* SWANHILD *stands alert, not daring to look.*

OLAF. Anyone in this house, here?

SWANHILD (*breathlessly*). Yea!

OLAF. Is there harborage here for a wayfaring guest to-night?

SWANHILD. How comest thou? As a friend?

OLAF. There is naught but peace in my heart. (*He approaches her.*) What wilt thou? I am nigh death for lack of . . . .

He sees her. SWANHILD *has turned toward him.*

SWANHILD (*simply*). Welcome. I looked for thee.

OLAF. And I for thee. Where have we twain met before?

SWANHILD. 'Twas in a dream.

They stand wondering at each other. Then she leads him to the guest seat.

The curtain falls at this point, which is the end of the Third Act.

THE FOURTH ACT

THE DRAINING OF THE LEES

The Scene remains unchanged. SWANHILD *and* OLAF *are at the table. They are in animated conversation.* OLAF *has just finished his supper.*

OLAF. Ay, ay, thy dream! And that was marvellous strange!

SWANHILD. More marvel still to find thy very self!

OLAF. And most of all for me to light on thee! Lo, now, this wonder! Here have we spoken but a little while together, and yet mine heart hath dreamed upon thee always!

SWANHILD. And mine on thee, meseems! To-night made clear what lingered there before.

OLAF. 'Tis so with me! There was a haunting of thee ere ever I saw thy face. There hath been somewhat sweet of thee within me all my days. I never knew till now!

SWANHILD. 'Tis Heaven whispering, to hear thee say so!

OLAF. I have known thee other worlds than this.

SWANHILD. Two pixies, we have played at hide-and-find among the shadows!

OLAF. And I have lost thee ever, but to find again, as now.

SWANHILD. Meseems I have danced goblin with thee down the ways of dreamland; hither and thither we have tripped together in the moonbeams, thou and I, to the music of waves washing!

Olaf. In dreamland, sayst thou? Lo, now, that is passed; and here we be alive together, thou and I!

Swanhild. What wouldst thou do for me? I would be a little house-thrall for thee, and joy therein.

Olaf. I would be thy warrior, I!

Swanhild. Yea, and what do?

Olaf. Somewhat with life in't! Some great deed! Some mighty stroke that . . . . Or shall it be death? Ay, that way, too, would show . . . .

Swanhild. Nay, not so far for me . . . .

Olaf. Methinks there were no sweeter death in all the world than die for thee.

Swanhild. It fears me; yet I love to hear thee say so!
Oh, I love thee, I love thee! . . . .
How dost thou deem of me? Wilt be my lover?

Olaf. I will be more, an Fate so will!

Swanhild. How may that be? Love is all there may be! There never may be more!

Olaf. Nay, but to have thee for my very mate! . . . .

Swanhild *starts to her feet.*

Swanhild. Dost thou mean . . . . What! Thy wife?

Olaf. Ah, little maid! I have wronged thee with my rough speech!

Swanhild. Mayhap thou deemst me older than I am; I look old for my years . . . .

Olaf. Forgive me, forgive me.

Swanhild. I never blamed thee.

OLAF. Look into mine eyes! Little maid! Let me know myself forgiven! Look! Look! . . . .
Ah! Thy soul again!

She leans over the table toward him.

SWANHILD. I can see myself in thine eyes. What canst thou see in mine?

OLAF. I see sweet lilies growing in a mead apart!

SWANHILD. What be they? Lilies . . . .

OLAF. Flowers like thee.

SWANHILD. I know none such in Icefirth. They grow not hereabout.

OLAF. There hath no need. I have plucked them idly, many a time, in the land I come from. I should have worshipped them more tenderly.

SWANHILD. 'Tis a fair land hath grown thee. Tell me thereof.

OLAF. 'Tis far off, over the sea. Much have I loved my land, and counted it the only land for me. Now have I found another!

SWANHILD. Yea—Iceland!

OLAF. Iceland hath shown it me.

SWANHILD. Tell me one thing. What is thy name?

OLAF. Have I not told thee? My name is Olaf.

SWANHILD (*echoing*). Olaf! Olaf! It sounds upon the lips like a sigh. Olaf! Wouldst thou like to know my name? They call me Swanhild.

Olaf. 'Tis like the lapping of soft waves upon a strand of gold!

Swanhild. Tell me, dost thou sing songs? Art thou a skald?

Olaf. What! A *skald!* Nay, I am a warrior . . . . Why! Hast thou any liking for skalds?

Swanhild. They have ever seemed most wonderful to me!

Olaf (*suddenly converted*). Mayhap I *be* a little bent that way.

Swanhild. Henceforward I shall love the warrior best! Sure; 'tis a kind of skald!

Olaf. I will be both for thee! Harkee! I know two rimes!

Swanhild. Dost thou? Dost thou?

Olaf. Ay. One is for warts upon the hand, and t'other for the evil eye! I learned them when I was a boy.

Swanhild. Nay, but out of thine own heart, Olaf! Canst thou not sing songs out of thine own heart?

Olaf. I can try!

Swanhild. Do! Do!

Olaf. How might it be an I sang a song of war—something stirring and manful, with great battles in't?

Swanhild. Yea, and of dwarfs and of giants, and great drakes, fiery eyed, that come out upon thee, silent, in the darkness! Ugh!

Olaf. Ooh!
Canst thou sing songs out of thine own heart?

Swanhild. I can a little; but I wait thine, Olaf.

Olaf. Oh! I will anon. 'Tis rusty with me now.

Swanhild. Dost thou know what I do think?

Olaf. Nay; what?

Swanhild. I think thou couldst not an thou tried!

Olaf. What! Not sing songs? Could not?

Swanhild (*solemnly*). Could not!

Olaf. I can do more than sing! I can fight!

Swanhild (*teasing*). Yea, but not sing songs!

Olaf. I can kill a man—*two* men—*three!*

Swanhild (*seriously*). Oh! Hast thou ever?

Olaf. Nay; but I will!
As for that other, thou shouldst hear my father! He hath the voice for singing, I promise thee!

Swanhild. What! Is he a skald?

Olaf. Not so; a warrior he—a mighty one! Yet he hath sung me many songs, one time and another, out in Vineland yonder.

Swanhild. In Vineland! What—thy father! Tell me, is he yet living?

Olaf. I deem so; and like to be this many a long year—a hearty man, my father! He parted from me but this very night, out in the mist there.

Swanhild. That was strange! To-night! Most strange! What parted you?

Olaf. Why, now thou mindest me, 'twas a sword brought that about. Mine hanger-buckle came undone, and ere I was well ware, down fell sword and all a-clattering among the lava-crags. Whiles I lagged behind, to look for it, there rose a blast of storm and hid my father from me. Long time I cried his name, but gat no answer, until the gale had spent itself beyond the distant hills; then at last, far off, deep down below me in the gully, I heard his voice: "I have lost thee, boy. Where art thou? Hast thou found thy sword?" I told him that I sought it still. "Why, then," cried he, "I will press forward. Perchance 'twere better I went before thee. Follow thou on when thou hast found the weapon. There is but one path, and that a sure one. Thou canst not miss it." "Get thee forward, father," I shouted; "we shall meet some time ere the night be out, I guess, or I am not thy son. 'Tis not the first time that I found my way alone!"

Scarce had the laughter of his voice replying, faded away, when a mist came down and covered up my path! I have wandered without my sword, without my father, ever since!

Swanhild. That was ill-luck for thee to lose thy sword!

Olaf. Nay, I reck not of that; 'twas a boy's weapon at best. I always told my father so.

Swanhild. How if thy father had found way hither in place of thee?

Olaf. What! And sat in the guest seat set for me!

Swanhild. Ay, and eaten up thy griddle-cakes!

Olaf. And won first gaze on thee!

Swanhild. H'm! And had spoke of love, mayhap, before I ever saw thee!

Olaf (*laughing*). Nay, I take thy trick! Thou canst not egg me on against my father! We be like two brothers together, he and I . . . .

Yea, he must find me another sword in place of that I lost! A man's—like his!

Swanhild. Tell me; is he featured at all like thee?

Olaf. Folk say so; but older, and with a beard.

Ay, it had been strange an I had found him here before me!

Swanhild. That might well have been; and, indeed . . . .

Olaf. In sooth, nay. The house he was bound for lies a ten leagues farther on from here.

Swanhild. Oh! What house is that?

Olaf. Why, the house of one called Valbrand.

Swanhild. What! Valbrand Thorkelsson?

Olaf. The very same. He is my father's foster-brother. They were his songs my father sang to me in Vineland. Dost thou know the man?

Swanhild *smothers a little laugh.*

Say, dost thou?

Swanhild. 'M! 'M! And Herdisa, his wife.

Olaf. Ay, he named Herdisa once.

Swanhild (*after a moment*). Spake he of any others in that house?

Olaf. There was old Thorkel and . . . . Ay, and . . . .

Swanhild. Why dost thou redden so, and glance aside?

Olaf (*confused*). Nay, I knew not that I reddened.

SWANHILD (*teasing*). Nay, nay, nay! . . . .

OLAF. Why, 'twas but for some folly that my father spake to me. He—he spake of a daughter . . . .

SWANHILD. I see no such folly in that!

OLAF. 'Twas what my father said that made the folly.

SWANHILD. What did he say? Tell me, tell me?

OLAF. He—he deemed perchance that she and I—that she and I—might make a match of it!

They both laugh uncontrollably.

SWANHILD. Nay, but why do I laugh? Mayhap, when thou shalt know her, she will please thee better than I!

OLAF. Thou hast made me hate her by saying so!

SWANHILD. Thou wilt love her then—at least as well as now thou lovest me!

OLAF (*emphatically*). That will I never do!

SWANHILD. She is full as fair to look upon as I, yet, in good sooth, I myself count little of her!

OLAF. I am one with thee in that!

SWANHILD (*in his tone*). That wilt thou never be!

OLAF. Nay; but Swanhild—Swanhild . . . .

SWANHILD (*suddenly*). Say! Did thy father *name* her to thee?

OLAF. Nay, he knew not himself. He had but heard of her from another. What is she called?

SWANHILD. Lo, now, how thou lingerest yet upon her in thy thoughts!

OLAF. Well, well, forget her! She is naught to me—will never be aught! Look thou! Here is the ring my father bade me give her, an I won her love. It never left his arm for all the years I knew him till two days ago. 'Tis dear to me for that. How if I troth thee with it now? Wilt thou then believe me?

They stand facing each other across the table.

SWANHILD (*gravely*). And if I take it . . . .

OLAF. Thereby shalt thou learn my true love for thyself, and how, moreover, Valbrand's maid shall ne'er be aught to me.

SWANHILD *puts the ring on her arm.*

SWANHILD. Then—for thy love's sake only.

She stands rapt for a moment.

Lord! How we prattle! Who knows what great things be in store for us! I know of one for thee, anyway!

OLAF. What may that be?

SWANHILD. Why, when thou knowest Valbrand's daughter!

OLAF. Death take her! I would she were a thousand leagues away, not ten!

SWANHILD. That minds me. Who told thee of Valbrand's house—that it was so far away?

OLAF. It was a kind old man I met out yonder, just ere I blew my horn. He bade me hither for the night instead.

SWANHILD. I bless him for that! How looked he?

OLAF. I could not see his face; a hood half hid him. He had on a gown with beads upon it.

SWANHILD (*startled*). How! That would be the priest!

OLAF. Ay, very like. But come, the meal is over. Show me the spot where first I came upon thee in thy dream. In thy bower, thou saidst. Is it yon?

He turns, facing the bower.

SWANHILD. Yea, wouldst thou like to see it? 'Tis in there I am mostly wont to spend my days when the spring is come.

OLAF. I would fain see the place that brought us twain such joy.

SWANHILD. Why, then, thou shalt. See!

She goes to the bower and draws one curtain aside.

I shall always look upon my bower with different eyes, after this night. See! 'Tis dark; but go thou in. I will follow.

OLAF *makes to enter, but suddenly reels back, his hand to his brow.*

OLAF. Ah! 'Tis magic! I saw . . . .

SWANHILD. Friend! Olaf! Olaf! What didst thou see? . . . .

OLAF. Why, methought mine own shape lying there . . . .

SWANHILD. Olaf! Thou art sick . . . .

OLAF. Ay, that will be it . . . . Stunned a little . . . . Ah! 'Twas like death for the moment. . . . . I will rest me a little, and then . . . .

SWANHILD. Ay, do. (*She helps him across to the ingle.*)

'Tis the long wandering without food and rest hath wearied thee. So, lie thou there.

He lies down on the ingle-seat, at full length, his head toward her, to the right.

Ah! Thy color comes again! So! But thou didst affright me! Are more comforted?

Olaf. Ay, fret not. There is rest here, with thee, and in thy house.

Swanhild. Sleep a little. It will ease thee.

Olaf. What—now?

Swanhild. Yea, thou art weary. I will watch over till thou wake.

Olaf. Why, 'tis fretful of me; but so I will.

He rests his face upon his arm, but it is still to be seen.

Swanhild. Shall I sing thee to thy sleep?

Olaf. Yea, Swanhild, do.

The voice falters with sleep already.

Swanhild. Wait thou one . . . .

She brings over her seat and the harp. She sits just below the ingle, to the right of it.

Olaf. Let it be one of thine—own—little songs. Out of —thine—own—heart.

Swanhild (*singing*).

The brunt of the day, and the burden,
Have wandered away in the west;
  Then cast off the coil
  Of thy troublesome toil,
    And thy guerdon
      Be rest.

OLAF (*drowsily*). And so it is—rest.

SWANHILD (*singing*).

The shadow of death is a slumber . . . .

OLAF. Nay—sing—Swanhild . . . .

SWANHILD (*singing*).

The shadow of death is a slumber
That waiteth the morn of the blest;
  Then cast off the strife,
  And the ills of thy life,
    That encumber
      Thy rest.

OLAF'S *face drops down over his arm, and is hidden.*

Olaf! Olaf! (*A pause.*) Asleep!

HERDISA *comes in.*

HERDISA. The waves hold Winterfeast to-night. They yield up naught. They glut them still with the corpses of dead men.

SWANHILD. Ssh! Ssh! Not a word, mother!

She joins her above the ingle.

HERDISA. Well, it will wait. By-and-by for that!

SWANHILD. What ails thee, mother? Why dost thou look about?

HERDISA. 'Tis a man I look for—a man in all this world!

SWANHILD. Ssh! Not so loud! He will hear thee!

HERDISA. He! Who? Who?

SWANHILD. My warrior!

HERDISA. A warrior! What dost thou mean, child?

SWANHILD. Ssh! He is yonder, asleep.

HERDISA. What! *Bjorn!* . . . .

SWANHILD. Nay, not Bjorn himself, but . . . . Nay, I can keep secrets, too. He is marvellous like him!

HERDISA. How! Mighty and terrible, with warfare in his throat?

SWANHILD. I doubt it not, an matters lay that way.

HERDISA. Ha! He hath come from God!

SWANHILD. So deemed I.

HERDISA. A warrior, sayst thou. How might we bind him to us, fast?

SWANHILD. He would taste the bitter death for me, he said.

HERDISA. A good word. Asleep, thou sayst?

SWANHILD. Ay.

HERDISA. I will go look on him. (*Pauses.*) Yet sooth, it fears me.

SWANHILD. How so?

HERDISA. Lest he be not man enow.

SWANHILD. Look for thyself.

HERDISA (*after a moment's hesitation*). I will.

She goes forward and looks at OLAF.

His face is hidden.

SWANHILD. 'Tis like God's sunlight!

HERDISA. What! Soft-shining, like—like a girl's?

SWANHILD. Bright-eager, as at mid-day.

HERDISA. I will move him.

SWANHILD. Nay, wake him not. Let him rest awhile. He hath wandered all day shelterless and without food. He hath need of rest. It will refresh him.

HERDISA. Mayhap thou art right. He will need strength.

SWANHILD. He nigh-on fainted awhile since.

HERDISA. How! A weakling! . . . .

SWANHILD. Nay, but weary with the day's wearing.

HERDISA. He is limbed lithely. His hand hath a grip in it by seeming. How long hath he lain thus?

SWANHILD. But a little. I sang him to his sleep.

HERDISA. Against my coming. Ay, thou didst well.

SWANHILD. Sleep will better him. Thou shalt see him mighty when he wakes.

HERDISA. So *would* I—strong, with fire in his eyes, and the echo of great thunders in his voice!

SWANHILD. Thou hast ever loved the warrior, mother!

HERDISA. Peace, my child! Thy father was a skald!

SWANHILD. Until thou madest him warrior. I know thy reasons now, mother . . . .

HERDISA. How! My reasons . . . .

SWANHILD. 'Tis blithe in woman's heart to look on such a man!

HERDISA. It waxes late. I shall have a tale to tell thee on the morrow.

SWANHILD. I shall have one for thee.

HERDISA. Till then I would have thy peace unbroken. Come, get thee to bed, child. I will sit and watch.

SWANHILD. Wilt thou not let me sit with thee a bit?

HERDISA. Nay, press me not; 'tis late. Come, little ewe-lamb!

SWANHILD. Since needs be.

They embrace.

HERDISA. Be my little maid, and sleep.

SWANHILD. To-night hath been the happiest Winterfeast of all my life! Good-night, motherkin.

HERDISA. Good-night.

SWANHILD (*halfway across the hall*). Oh! My grandsire bade me give a message to thee . . . .

HERDISA. It will wait. I look for naught from thy grandsire. Good-night, my child.

SWANHILD. Give him a long rest, mother!

HERDISA. I will. I will.

SWANHILD *goes out.* HERDISA *remains standing a minute, lost in deep thought. Then, her attention being arrested by the sword, she picks it up, and sits.*

Ay, with his own sword! 'Tis meet! 'Tis meet! 'Tis meet!

She lays it across her knees, the handle toward the sleeping man.

Still asleep. Yea, he should be a warrior by the shape of him. And yet I fear when I shall see his face, lest I find the niddering there. Ay, and for more cause, yet . . . .

How the moments creep—slow—slow—like a thief!

Still sound. Well, 'tis strength in him, I need. That other hath strength enow . . . . How like a great mast he towered above the warriors, here in this hall, that day I . . . .

Checking herself, she looks at the sword-edge curiously.

Valbrand's! Let me not forget it! 'Tis my husband's blood!

OLAF (*drowsily*). Swanhild!

HERDISA (*stiffening, looking before her*). Ha!

OLAF (*half-waking*). Thy little song again! (*He lifts up his head.*) What, Swanhild . . . . Eh! Who art thou? (*He sits up.*)

Throughout the following scene HERDISA *sits immovable, gazing before her, not daring to look at him.*

HERDISA. I am the mother of that maid with whom thou didst speak erewhile.

OLAF. Her mother! Why, then, greetings to thee!

HERDISA (*in a quiet, strained voice*). Come thou blest, and welcome.

OLAF (*a little embarrassed by her manner.*) Ay, ay; that is kind of thee. Then . . . .

Hath she spoken to thee yet?

HERDISA. She hath told all it profits me to know.

OLAF. And doth it like thee? Hast thou aught to say against it?

HERDISA. It likes me. She said thou wert a warrior.

OLAF (*eagerly*). And so I am!

HERDISA. Thou hast the bitter voice of such!

OLAF. What, hast thou no love of warriors?

HERDISA. My husband was a skald.

OLAF (*taken aback*). So! Ay, 'twill be from him, mayhap, thy little maid . . . .
It is a gentle maid!

HERDISA. She hath been all my life! She will be more hereafter.

OLAF (*suddenly possessed by a new thought*). Mayhap the word rests not with thee. Perchance her father . . . . Ay, he may not . . . .

HERDISA (*quietly*). She hath no father.

OLAF. Hath no father?

HERDISA. He is dead.

OLAF. Sure, she named her father. She waited for him here.

HERDISA. He is dead.

OLAF. How may that be? When came he by his death?

HERDISA. Slain—scarce an hour ago.

OLAF. Slain!

HERDISA (*after a moment*). Ay. The sword of his slaying lies across my knee. It is yet wet with his blood.

OLAF. But who hath done this deed? What enemy hath . . . .

HERDISA. No enemy, but one most near to him.

OLAF. What! . . . . Thou!

HERDISA (*her eyes dilate*).

OLAF (*under his breath*). *Thou!*

HERDISA (*mastering herself*). I have lifted no hand against him.

OLAF. Forgive me; but thy mood—so strange—so calm . . . .

HERDISA. 'Tis no light matter for a woman to lose her mate!

OLAF. Sure, sure. Nor for a child its father! How will Swanhild take this? . . . .

HERDISA. There is rest for her to-night. On the morrow she must needs be told. Ay, and more yet, maybe!

OLAF. I take thee; 'tis the blood-atonement thou wouldst name. But the murderer! Where is he?

HERDISA (*like a whirlwind*). Yonder, left, over the bridge, up in the pathless ice-hills to the north, he hides—snared like a wolf in the trap!

OLAF. And which of thy kinsmen hast thou speeded thither to hew him to pieces?

HERDISA. None! None! I have none left for such a deed!

OLAF. What friend? What aid of a man, then, hast thou left about thee, at thy need?

HERDISA. None! My child and I stand helpless and alone in all this world!

OLAF. What kind of a man is he—a warrior?

HERDISA. None greater! He stands above all other, like a mountain, topping the feeble hillocks!

OLAF. Mayhap, then, thou wilt deem 'tis no *boy's* work to deal with such a man as he?

HERDISA. I trow not!

OLAF. And thy little maid, she will think as thou?

HERDISA. Doubt it not.

OLAF. Then lo, *I* stand here, thy friend and helper! I will take up the blood-hate for thee against that wolf of murder!

HERDISA. What! Thou wilt?

OLAF. Yea! I might not sing songs out of mine own heart—I am no skald—but I will prove myself a warrior in this deed!

HERDISA. 'Tis the right voice; and yet, indeed, I fear me still . . . .

OLAF. There is no cause! Look upon me, friend! Why wilt thou ever turn thine eyes away?

HERDISA. I fear to look upon the man that shall slay—him.

OLAF. Is he so terrible? I long to grope with him. How shall I cast thy fears? What proof to give thee ere the deed be done?

HERDISA. Why, some oath might bind thee more—some mighty oath. It might bind both of us!

OLAF. That oath will I give thee.

HERDISA. How high canst thou swear? Knowest thou the White Christ?

OLAF. Nay, I wot not of him. Is he not thy god, here?

HERDISA. Folk say they hold by Him.

OLAF. Nay, I have naught in him.

HERDISA. How, then, wilt thou swear?

OLAF. When I am with my father I take his sword, so, and kiss it, giving my plain word.

HERDISA. Thou wilt hold to that?

OLAF. Sure, a man may not gainsay his word, once given!

HERDISA. Then—here is a sword—swear!

She rises and hands him the sword without looking at him. OLAF *holds the sword in front of him, kneeling on one knee.*

OLAF. Why, then, thus:
"To help thee, friend, in thy most bitter need; to satisfy the blood-hate in thine heart; wrong for wrong; life for life—" This is my plain word for thee.

He kisses the sword.

HERDISA (*passionately*). Now! Forth to thy deed!

OLAF *does not move; he is gazing, dumfounded, upon the sword.*

Why dost thou halt? What seest thou there? Art thou afeard?

OLAF. Yea. Whose sword is this?

HERDISA. Why, his—the murderer's! Yon bloody weapon wrought our woe—made fatherless my child—slew, ruthless, Valbrand, my husband!

OLAF. What! . . . . *Valbrand!* . . . .

HERDISA. Ay, that was my husband's name.

OLAF. And that other . . . . that other? . . . .

HERDISA. He awaits thee yonder!

OLAF. His name! His name!

HERDISA. Thou wilt know him by his voice. 'Tis a mighty voice, like thine!

OLAF. His name!

HERDISA. Bjorn Asmundsson!

OLAF (*dropping the sword*). Ah! I cannot do it!

HERDISA. What, afeard? Thou hast sworn an oath!

OLAF. It may not be! It may not be!

HERDISA. Thine oath! Thine oath!

OLAF. I take it back! 'Tis void! Void!

HERDISA. I hold thee to it! . . . . Ha! . . . .

> OLAF *lifts up his head and stands facing her. For the first time she sees him.*

Who art thou?

OLAF (*after a pause, brokenly*). Olaf Bjornsson, the son of him that slew thy mate.

> *There is a tense silence for about three heartbeats. Then* HERDISA *breaks it by an awful laugh.*

HERDISA. Ha, ha, ha! His *bastard!* I thank Thee, God! I deemed Thee dead, up yonder! We lose time! Forth to thy deed!

OLAF. Hearken to me . . . . One word . . . .

HERDISA. Thy deed!

OLAF. How shall I slay my father, whom I love?

HERDISA. I have an oath against thee!

OLAF. He would but kiss me whiles I did the deed!

HERDISA. Take up thy sword!

OLAF. Nay, by my soul, I will not!

HERDISA. Thine oath!

OLAF. I cast it from me!

HERDISA. "In my bitter need," thou saidst! The need is come!

OLAF. I spake in darkness!

HERDISA. Lo, *the blood-hate*, here. Thou didst swear to satisfy!

OLAF. By any other way—not this!

HERDISA. "Wrong for wrong! Life for life!" Those were thy words!

There is a pause. A terrible thought comes to OLAF.

OLAF (*quietly*). Said I so?

HERDISA. It was thine oath!

OLAF (*putting forth blind hands*). Then reach me forth the sword.

HERDISA (*after a moment*). What! Wilt thou do it!

OLAF. I have sworn.

> HERDISA *picks up the sword and gives it to him fearfully. He takes it without looking at it.*

HERDISA. His son indeed! So looked he those years gone by. Nay, turn thine eyes away.

OLAF. I will trouble thee no more.

> *He makes for the door. Halfway there he hesitates, and goes to the bower instead.*

HERDISA. The doors be barred beyond there. Yonder is thy way.

OLAF. All doors be open to me henceforward!

> *On the steps he turns.*

Name me kindly to thy little maid. 'Tis her bower!

> *He goes into the bower.*

HERDISA. How said he? .... *All doors be* .... *All doors* .... Nay! Not that! Not that! Stranger! Stay him, God! ....

> *There is heard one short groan, followed by the thud of a falling body. There is a long pause.*

Life for life, he said. Nay, then, it is true— Thou art dead, up yonder!

> *The door-latch lifts.*

Someone at the door!

> *She runs to the bower, turning a fearful face toward the door when she is upon the steps.*

Ay, and Swanhild, yonder, too! . . . .
Ssh! In! In!

She slips into the bower. At the same moment the door opens and there stumbles in, haggard, with eyes bloodshot, unkempt, not BJORN, *but* VALBRAND. *He staggers heavily to the opening leading into the room. There he leans wearily against the lintel.*

VALBRAND. Accursed! Accursed!

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Fourth Act.

THE FIFTH ACT

THE FRAGMENTS

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. VALBRAND, *after a moment, drags himself drunkenly to the table. Lifting the mead-bottle, he is about to pour out mead, but changing his mind, he crosses to the fireplace, and sits in the ingle-seat.*

VALBRAND. Oh! My foster-brother! My foster-brother!

SWANHILD *enters.*

SWANHILD. I cannot sleep. The shapes come thronging; and 'tis dark yonder. Mother! . . . .

What! Father, is it thou?

He gazes with scared eyes upon her.

I am glad thou hast come back again. It hath been long waiting, for my mother, without thee.

She goes to kiss him.

VALBRAND. Yonder, child. Kiss not—me.

SWANHILD. Where be they gone? Nay, 'tis some trick of thine to tease me! Where be they?

VALBRAND. They! Who?

SWANHILD. Why, my mother and . . . . Ah! Thou gamest with me! Mother hath devised this with thee!

VALBRAND. Thy mother! . . . . I have not seen thy mother.

SWANHILD. Why, 'twas but a little while since she was here—she and our new friend. Nay, I know thy mocking, for all thy fierce face! Father!

VALBRAND. Nay, farther off! There is that on my hand would soil thee!

SWANHILD. I care not for thy black hand! Come! 'Tis past laughing-time! Did not my mother bid thee play this trick upon me?

VALBRAND. I say I have not seen thy mother.

SWANHILD. Why, then, that is strange! Where be they, then?

VALBRAND. Say! Hast thou heard nothing? Did they not tell thee aught?

SWANHILD. 'Tis that I would ask *thee*. Did they not tell thee aught?

VALBRAND. Hast thou no fear of me?

SWANHILD. Fear thee! Why should I fear thee? Thou art my father! And for thou art, I know thou wilt wish the happiness of thy little wench! . . . . He hath all God's daylight for me!

VALBRAND. I see thou art yet in the dark; yet little can I read *thy* meaning.

SWANHILD. Nay, come now, where be they in hiding?

VALBRAND. My child, I tell thee I know nothing of thy meaning.

SWANHILD. What! Not of our guest, this evening?

VALBRAND. Speak not of him!

SWANHILD. Nay, but I must! The shining in his eyes hath witched me!

VALBRAND. Peace! Peace! I would not have Bjorn named within these doors again!

SWANHILD. I speak not of Bjorn, but of . . . .

VALBRAND. Thou saidst "our guest, this evening" . . . .

SWANHILD. Yea, meaning him that came hither when Bjorn was gone.

VALBRAND. What—a *second* guest? . . . .

SWANHILD. Nay, then, I see thou hast no dream of what great thing hath happened in our house to-night!

VALBRAND. Not a shadow! What hath happed?

SWANHILD. He lay here, upon the ingle, even half an hour ago. My mother watched him while he slept.

VALBRAND. What, thy new guest?

SWANHILD. Ay.

VALBRAND. When I came in, the house was empty. Dead men might have lain therein, so quiet it was. What was he?

SWANHILD. My lover! . . . . Ah! I have told thee. I had meant to keep it till the morrow. Why dost thou look upon me so? Thou wilt not gainsay our troth?

VALBRAND. Nay, wed whom thou wilt, child. I will not meddle. There shall be no shipwreck for *thee*.

SWANHILD *sits at his feet, on the footstool.*

SWANHILD (*chuckling*). Mother hath no inkling of it yet!

VALBRAND. Ay, thou, at least, shalt be . . . . Tell me, who is thy lover?

SWANHILD. Nay, if I tell thee *that*, it will startle thee indeed!

VALBRAND. It will take much to move me now.

SWANHILD. How if I tell thee it was he of whom I dreamed in the bower yonder to-night?

VALBRAND. In the bower? Yea, I remember; thou wert speaking on't to—to him that left us . . . .

SWANHILD (*nodding gaily*). H'm! To Bjorn! Sure, we shall have *him* back again now—ere long!

VALBRAND (*the idea dawning*). Yea, it comes back. . . . . He said . . . . Bjorn said . . . . Ay, and that loved one he spake of, to whom he sang my songs in Vineland! . . . .
Child! Child! . . . .

SWANHILD. Thou hast guessed it! Father! Father! . . . . Wilt thou keep it secret?

VALBRAND. In the name of God, speak it!

SWANHILD. Why, then, my lover, he that came . . . . Not one word now until the morrow . . . .

VALBRAND. Child! . . . .

SWANHILD. He is Bjorn's own son!

She rattles on, not seeing her father's face of horror above her.

He hath no guess I am thy daughter! He hath no knowledge of the house he rests in! He deems we live ten leagues away from here! . . . . Priest Ufeig lied to him, and sent him hither. I never knew such blessing lay in lies before!

VALBRAND. Thou hast plighted troth with—Bjorn's son!

SWANHILD. 'M! 'M!

She slips from the footstool to her knees, and gazes into the fire.

VALBRAND. Nay, then, God help thee!

SWANHILD. I pray He may . . . . He hath, most lovingly . . . .
I sang him my little song ere he fell asleep!

There is a short silence.

How silent all is here. 'Tis like the hush of dawn that nestles just betwixt the last of winter and the first of spring!

A pause.

They cannot be far off!

She jumps to her feet and moves about the room.

Mother! Mother! Olaf! . . . . Hide-and-find! Halloo! Halloo! Nay, I will wake you!

She goes to the door, on the left, and peeps in.

Motherkin! . . . . No answer. . . . . Ah, the bower! . . . .

As she approaches it HERDISA *appears.*

Ah! Found! Found! . . . .

HERDISA. Back! Back! Back! 'Tis no place for thee!

SWANHILD (*eagerly*). Where is he? . . . .

HERDISA. Nay, farther, farther! Yonder is despair!

SWANHILD. Mother! What is't?

HERDISA. 'Tis Ragnarok! 'Tis the doom of all things come!

Swanhild. Mother! Motherkin! What hath befallen?

Herdisa. Death hath befallen!

Swanhild. What dost thou say? . . . . Death! . . . .

Herdisa. He might have been mine own babe! Once, twice, thrice, in mine arms, I rocked him, so! Never knew I men were earth before! 'Tis cold, ice cold, that sleep!

Swanhild (*stunned*). It was *death* . . . . or I dream . . . .

Herdisa. Woe, woe, woe for hate and bitterness, and the cruel hunger for men's red blood! Woe for darkness of the soul and the clouded counsels of long-hidden lies! Woe for love—that sting of sorrow! Woe for the mighty harvest, the harvest of death, that hath swept pitiless o'er all the world!

Swanhild. That word again . . . .

Herdisa. I thought to save thee! I thought to spare thee till the morrow!

Swanhild. Spare not! Speak!

Herdisa. Would that I might lie to thee! But Fate is swift. The truth must out to-night.

Swanhild. Motherkin! . . . .

Herdisa. How shall I strike thee first?

Swanhild. Like Fate—swiftly . . . .

Herdisa. Then, first, know this: thy father . . . .

Swanhild. My father! What of my father!

Herdisa. He is dead!

Swanhild (*with a great cry of gladness*). My father—*dead!*

HERDISA. Yonder, upon the restless bosom of the fiord, he lies with death to-night!

SWANHILD. But, mother, thou art mad! 'Tis madness to call my father dead!

HERDISA. *Thou* art mad, child! What troll hath taken thee? Why wilt thou stand smiling upon me, there?

SWANHILD. Nay, if not mad, 'tis witchcraft! 'Tis some evil spell or dream! Sure, some huge lie hath crept from hell to snare thy soul! *My father dead!* . . . .

HERDISA (*fiercely*). There is yet more . . . . Hearken!

SWANHILD. I seek no more! Ah, joy! Joy! This one lie will I strangle first! Lord! What fear when first thou didst whisper *death!* Methought . . . .

Hark now! 'Tis Winterfeast! I deemed this night, already, the joy of all my life was full! There is joy beyond; and that I give to thee, my mother! 'Tis a feast gift for thee, motherkin! Lo, now, I give thee back thy dead! Behold!

She points to the ingle-seat. VALBRAND, *who has been sitting horror struck, rises and faces* HERDISA.

VALBRAND. Herdisa . . . .

There is a long pause. HERDISA *stands spellbound, her hand upon her heart. From this point to the end she speaks with deadly quietness.*

SWANHILD (*breathless with joy*). Now, give me back my lover! . . . .

HERDISA (*still gazing on* VALBRAND). Thou art mad. Thou hast no lover.

SWANHILD. Yea—Bjorn's son!

HERDISA. Thou dost not know Bjorn's son.

SWANHILD. Not Olaf! I spake with him to-night! We pledged love together! Look! Here be the ring he gave me.

She takes it off her arm.

HERDISA (*mechanically*). Ring . . . . Ring . . . .

Her eyes are still upon VALBRAND.

SWANHILD. Take it, mother.

HERDISA *takes it as in a trance. She looks at it without emotion. When she speaks she does so quite simply.*

HERDISA. 'Tis Bjorn's. I gave it him.

The eyes travel back to VALBRAND.

SWANHILD. Now, tell me . . . . Where is he?

HERDISA. Who?

SWANHILD. Olaf Bjornsson.

HERDISA. In the bower.

SWANHILD. Ah! . . . . (*She hesitates.*) I will join him. (*She still hesitates.*)

HERDISA (*after a pause*). 'Tis Fate.

SWANHILD *goes into the bower.* HERDISA *stands like stone.*

VALBRAND. Herdisa . . . .

HERDISA. Stand off! Stand off! Come not near!

She is in front of the guest seat.

What word from hell hast thou come back to utter?

VALBRAND. I have done thy bidding.

HERDISA. What did I bid thee?

VALBRAND. To learn his name on whom thy hate was lodged. My hands be yet scarce dry of his blood.

HERDISA. And his name?

VALBRAND. Bjorn.

There is a pause.

HERDISA. Thou hast thy payment.

A sickly little cry is heard from the bower.

VALBRAND. What was yon?

HERDISA'S *eyes take in the horror. She sinks into the guest seat.*

'Twas like the cry of a little ewe-lamb new-come to slaughter.

HERDISA. It is enough.

Slowly the head sinks down; the arms relax; the ring still remains loosely in one hand.

VALBRAND (*breathlessly*). Yonder, it was.

He goes into the bower. THORKEL *enters followed by* UFEIG.

THORKEL. Come thou in, thou prowling dog. This last word in thine ear, and I am free of thee forever.

UFEIG. I shall be glad to hear it.

THORKEL. Valbrand is alive; that much I know; and for the rest—there shall be set up a peace, indeed, in this house henceforward.

UFEIG. How? By yet more lies?

THORKEL. Nay, by truth. I am resolved to tell Herdisa all.

UFEIG. Good! She waits thee yonder.

> VALBRAND *is heard crying out with agony from the bower. A moment later he appears.*

THORKEL. Ha! My son! My son! . . . .

> VALBRAND *rushes past him, raving, toward the door.*

Valbrand! Whither away? . . . .

VALBRAND (*turning*). To the fiord yonder! I go to wash me clean of blood!

THORKEL. Ay, as I thought . . . . Bjorn's . . . .

VALBRAND. Nay, thine! Thine! Thine!

> *He rushes out, crying wildly.*

My child! My child!

THORKEL. What meant he? Mine! How mine? (*Inclining toward the door.*) Nay, then . . . .

UFEIG. Herdisa waits thee yonder. To thy tale.

THORKEL. Yea, but not thou by the while!

UFEIG. How! Shall not thy priest look on?

THORKEL. Thou art no priest of mine!

UFEIG. Have I not proved myself thy priest this night?

THORKEL. How so? Yonder lies thy temple, over the hill. I am of Thor.

UFEIG. Howbeit we have served in one temple together this night, Thorkel, and I have been thy priest!

THORKEL. Get thee gone! From this time forth no more darken my doors!

UFEIG. There hath no need.

He points to his withered arm. One might almost think it moved.

So! I leave thee.

The door closes noiselessly behind him.

THORKEL. Now, my girl, hearken! Mayhap it may break thy heart . . . . Yet it may no longer be hidden from thee . . . . Herdisa . . . . Herdisa . . . .

He gently lifts the bowed head. It drops helplessly, pathetically, upon his breast. She is already dead. From her hand drops BJORN'S *ring. It rolls toward the ingle.*

Herdisa . . . .

The curtain falls. It is the end of the play.

THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE

A PLAY OF THE PRESENT DAY, SETTING FORTH IN SIGNIFICANT FORM BY THE AID OF SEVEN PLAYERS THE STORY OF ONE MORNING IN THE EARLY SPRING

The hunger for brotherhood is at the bottom of the unrest of the modern civilized world.—George Frederick Watts

THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE, written mainly during the summer and autumn of 1906, reached completion early in 1907. It was licensed, produced for copyright purposes at the Bijou Theatre, London, and duly entered at Stationers' Hall, June 19, 1907.

Its first production in the United States was at the Academy of Music, Baltimore, March 5, 1908, the New York run commencing at the Savoy Theatre March 23 of the same year.

It was first issued in book form by Harper and Brothers, New York, April, 1908. Thanks are due to these publishers for permission to use the play in the present edition, since it is still on their list.

THE SERVANT IN THE HOUSE

The Servant in the House is a play of the Present Day, setting forth in Significant Form, by the aid of Seven Players, the Story of One Morning in the Early Spring.

The Time is now.

The Place is a Room in an English Vicarage: a comfortable Jacobean interior, wherein the skilled eye may discern the blessings of culture, riches, and religion brought together in one perfect harmony—and rather in that order. Three exits are provided: French windows opening upon a garden, left; a main door in the rear; and another door below the fireplace, right, leading to the drawing-room.

A Table set for breakfast is within cosy distance of the fire; and on the opposite side of the room a settee. Right of the main door is a sideboard; left, an antique credence-table, upon which, placed in readiness for the Vicar, are a paten and cruet. There are chairs, books, things; and a really striking painting of the Son of Man somewhere in the background.

The Persons represented are James Ponsonby Makeshyfte, D.D., the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Lancashire; the Reverend William Smythe, the Vicar; Auntie, his wife; Mary, their niece; Robert Smith, a gentleman of necessary occupation; Rogers, a page-boy; and Manson, a butler.

THE FIRST ACT

Rogers *and* Manson *are discovered laying the breakfast, the lad being at the upper end of the table,* Manson, *his face not yet seen, being at the lower end.* Rogers *is an ordinary little cockney boy in buttons;* Manson *is dressed in his native Eastern costume.*

Rogers (*glancing across curiously*). Arskin' your pardon, Mr. Manson . . . .

Manson. Yes: what is it, Rogers?

Rogers. Funny thing—cawn't get it out of my 'ead as I've knowed you somewhere before. Don't scarcely seem possible, do it, Mr. Manson?

Manson. Many things are possible in this world, Rogers.

Rogers. That's all right; but 'ow long 'av' you been in England, Mr. Manson?

Manson. I landed late last night, if that's what you mean.

Rogers. Well, I never been in the continong of Asia, where you come from; and there you are!

Manson (*quietly*). Yes: here I am.

He goes to the sideboard and busies himself with a bowl of flowers.

Rogers. Perhaps it's this reincarnytion the *Daily Mail* been writing about. Ever see the *Daily Mail* out there, Mr. Manson?

MANSON. No: we had few advantages.

ROGERS. Rum idea, reincarnytion! Think, Mr. Manson, perhaps we wos lords once in ancient Babylon, you an' me!

MANSON. And now butler and page-boy, eh?

ROGERS (*scratching his head*). Does seem a bit of a come-down, don't it?

MANSON. That's one way of looking at it.

> ROGERS, *enticed of Satan, has conveyed a furtive spoonful of jam toward his mouth.*

(*Without turning.*) Isn't there jam in the kitchen, Rogers?

ROGERS (*scared*). Evings! E've got eyes in 'is boots! S'y, do you call it stealing, Mr. Manson?

MANSON. Do you? (*Persisting.*) Do you?

> ROGERS *drops the spoon and moves mournfully away from temptation.*

ROGERS. 'Pon my word, Mr. Manson, you give me the fair creeps and no mistike!

MANSON. You will get over that when you know me better.

ROGERS. Mr. Manson! Do you mind if I arst you a question?

MANSON. No; what is it?

ROGERS. What d'you wear them togs for? This ain't India.

MANSON. People don't always recognise me in anything else.

He turns for the first time. It is the face of a servant. Its air of supreme greatness can mean no less.

ROGERS. Garn, Mr. Manson, that's a bit orf! Clothes don't make all that difference, come now! . . . .

MANSON. They are the only things the people of this world see.

ROGERS (*after a pause*). Excuse me, Mr. Manson, you mek me larf.

MANSON. That's all right, Rogers. I have a sense of humor myself, or I shouldn't be here.

ROGERS (*suddenly sentimental*). Talking about clothes, Mr. Manson, I often thinks in my 'ead as I'd like to be a church clergyman, like master. Them strite-up collars are very becoming. Wouldn't you, Mr. Manson?

MANSON. Wouldn't that be rather presuming, Rogers?

ROGERS. Don't you mek no mistike about it! 'Ere! (*He grows confidential.*) *You are* a butler, ain't you? Ain't you, now? . . . .

MANSON. Something like that.

ROGERS. Well, perhaps master 'asn't allus been as 'igh— See! O' course, I don't know, but they *do* s'y as 'e was once only a . . . . Wot oh! 'Ere 'e is!

The VICAR'S *voice is heard off.*

VICAR. I shall be in to breakfast at a quarter to nine. Don't wait for me, dearest.

He enters hurriedly from the door, on the right. He has on his cassock and biretta.

So awkward— Both my curates down with the whooping-cough! To-day, too! Just when I was expecting . . . .

He sees MANSON *and stands riveted.*

ROGERS. It's the new butler, sir. Mr. Manson, sir.

VICAR. Surely, I—I've seen you somewhere before.

MANSON (*looking at him*). Have you, sir?

VICAR. Hm! No, I can't quite . . . .

ROGERS. Beg pardon, sir: getting on for eight.

He hands him the silver paten from the credence-table. There is bread upon it.

VICAR (*taking it mechanically*). Hm! These mysteries are not always helpful . . . . Anyway, I'm glad to see you, Manson. When did you arrive?

He begins to break the bread unconsciously.

MANSON. Early this morning, sir. I should have come sooner; but I had a little trouble down at the Customs.

VICAR. Indeed! How was that?

MANSON. They said something about the new Alien Act, sir.

VICAR. Of course, of course. Er . . . . You speak English remarkably well.

MANSON. I have seen a good deal of the English, one time and another.

VICAR. That's good: it will save a lot of explanation. By-the-bye . . . .

My old friend in Brindisi, who recommended you, writes that you bore a very excellent character with your late employer in India; but there was one matter he didn't mention— No doubt you will recognise its importance in a clergyman's family— He never mentioned your religion.

MANSON. I can soon remedy that, sir. My religion is very simple. I love God and all my brothers.

VICAR (*after a pause*). God and your brothers . . . .

MANSON. Yes, sir: *all* of them.

The VICAR *lets the paten sink to the table beside him.*

VICAR (*slowly*). That is not always so easy, Manson; but it is my creed, too.

MANSON. Then— Brother!

Rapt in thought, the VICAR *takes his proffered hand.* MARY *enters. She is a slim young girl in her teens, the picture of rosy sweetness and health.*

MARY. Good-morning, Uncle William! Oh! . . . . I suppose you're Manson? I must say you look simply ripping! How do you do? My name's Mary. (*She offers her hand.*)

MANSON. A very dear name, too!

MARY (*embarrassed, blurting*). We were wondering last night about your religion. I said . . . .

VICAR. Mary, my child . . . .

MARY. You don't *look* like a cannibal. After all, even the devil isn't as black as he's . . . . Oh, I beg your pardon: perhaps I'm rude.

VICAR. Yes, indeed you are. Don't take any notice of our little feather-brain, Manson.

MARY. I say, has uncle told you who's coming to-day?

MANSON. No.

MARY. Not about Uncle Josh?

VICAR. T-t-t! You mustn't call your uncle Joshua that! It is irreverent. He may resent it.

MARY. You know, *you'll* make me positively dislike him! Just fancy, Manson, meeting an uncle whom you've never so much as set eyes on before! I don't even know what he looks like.

She is looking MANSON *in the face. He returns her gaze curiously.*

MANSON. Then—you have a surprise in store.

MARY. *You* ought to be awfully interested! You will, when you hear where he comes from!

MANSON. I *am*—interested.

MARY. Then guess who he is!

MANSON. Guess—when I know already?

MARY. Oh, Uncle Joshua isn't his *only* name—don't you think that! He's a very important person, *I* can tell you! His name's on everybody's lips!

MANSON (*drily*). Really!

MARY. Can't you guess? . . . . Think of the very biggest person you ever heard of in this world!

MANSON. In *this* world: that sounds rather like . . . . Does he give free libraries?

MARY. I can't say I ever heard of that; but he does things quite as wonderful! Listen! What do you think of the Bishop of Benares!!

MANSON (*unimpressed*). Oh, it's the—Bishop of Benares, is it?

MARY. I must say, you don't seem very surprised! Surely you've heard of him? He *comes* from India.

MANSON (*quietly*). I happen to know him.

VICAR. No, really: this is most interesting!

MANSON. As a man might know *his own soul*, sir—as they say in India. His work has been mine, so to speak.

VICAR. Bless me, you will know him better than I do. I have never seen him since I was quite a little lad.

MARY (*with prodigious solemnity*). Just you think, Manson! He's my uncle—my own father's brother!

MANSON *is now between the two.*

MANSON. *Your* brother, sir?

VICAR (*fervently*). I am grateful to God for it, Manson: he is.

MANSON *regards him calmly for a moment: then he turns inquiringly toward* MARY.

MANSON. Then—Miss Mary? . . . .

VICAR (*quickly*). Oh, my niece is the daughter of—of my other brother.

MANSON. I see: *two* brothers?

VICAR (*shortly*). Yes, yes, I have: I—I had.

MANSON (*resuming his work at the table*). Thank you, sir: it's always helpful, coming to a new place, to know who are—and who are not—the family connections.

VICAR. Come, Rogers! My poor brethren in the church are waiting. I must see to their necessities at once.

He starts for the door.

MANSON. Pardon me, sir.

He hands him the paten, which he has forgotten. The VICAR *looks at him in troubled thought, and then goes out through the French windows, followed by* ROGERS.

ROGERS. I'll be back to 'elp you in with the breakfast, Mr. Manson.

MARY. Now, Manson: let's talk! You've got nothing more to do? . . . .

MANSON. Not till breakfast.

MARY. Then come over here, and make ourselves comfy.

They go over to the settee and sit.

Now! Tell me everything you know about the Bishop of Benares!

MANSON. What—Uncle Josh?

MARY. Ssh—ssh—ssh! That's naughty, you know! You heard what Uncle William said! . . . . Do you think he'd very much mind if I called him Uncle Josh?

MANSON. You may take it from *me*, that you may call him whatever you like.

MARY. That's all very well; but you're not Uncle Joshua!

MANSON. No? . . . .

MARY (*hotly*). No, you're not!

MANSON. Well, since you're so certain . . . .

MARY (*with conviction*). I'm perfectly certain he'll never stand a kid like me cheeking him and calling him names!

Uncle William's quite right! . . . . And that's why I've made up my mind that I sha'n't like him, after all!

MANSON. Indeed, I hope you will!

MARY. Do you believe in liking people simply because they're uncles?

MANSON. Perhaps I'm a prejudiced person.

MARY. I know exactly what he'll be—goody-goody, isn't he? You know—religious, and all that!

MANSON. God forbid!

MARY (*fearfully*). Oh, perhaps he's the other sort—like auntie's brother! He's a bishop—the Bishop of Lancashire. You see, I've heard a lot about bishops in my time, and they're not always quite nice men.

MANSON. And what sort is the Bishop of Lancashire?

MARY. Well, I don't think I ought to tell you; but I once heard *Uncle William* call him a devil!—And he's a clergyman!

MANSON. Your Uncle Joshua's reputation is exactly opposite.

MARY. There is that: everybody speaks awfully well of him.

MANSON. I don't think I would go so far as that: some people blackguard him abominably.

MARY. No!—Who?

MANSON. His clergy, chiefly.

MARY. His clergy! They must be dreadfully wicked men!

MANSON. No—only blind: perhaps, also, a little deaf. But between the two they manage to make his work very difficult.

MARY. Why? What do they do?

MANSON. It's partly what they do *not* do.

MARY. Oh, I see—lazy.

MANSON. Not precisely—they work: they are not idle; but they serve other masters.

MARY. Such as whom?

MANSON. The Bishop of Lancashire.

MARY (*after a pause*). I always thought he was such a great success out there. The papers have been full of it—of the millions of people who follow him about: they say they almost worship him in some places. What kind of people are they?

MANSON. Just common people.

MARY. And then, all that talk of the great churches he built out there! . . . .

MANSON. Churches?

MARY. Yes; didn't he?

MANSON. He built one.

MARY. What's it like?

MANSON. Those who have seen it say there is nothing like it on earth.

MARY (*eagerly*). Have you seen it?

MANSON. I was there when he built it.

MARY. From the very beginning?

MANSON. From the beginning.

MARY *pauses before speaking: then she says, slowly*:

MARY. I hope I *shall* like him. Is he—is he anything like you?

MANSON *regards her silently for a moment.*

MANSON. How is it that you know so little about him?

MARY. Well, you see, I only heard yesterday.

MANSON. I thought you said his *name* was on everybody's *lips*.

MARY. You don't understand. I mean, I never knew that he had anything to do with *me*—that he was my father's brother.

MANSON. Didn't *he* know?

MARY. Who—father? Oh, you see, I . . . . I *don't know my father* . . . .
Uncle William didn't know anything about it until yesterday.

MANSON. Hm! That is strange, too!

MARY. There's a bit of a mystery about it altogether. Would you like to hear? It is rather like a fairy-tale.

MANSON. It must be. Yes, do go on.

MARY. It was all through Uncle William's Restoration Fund. You see, our old church is in a perfectly rotten state of decay, and naturally it would take a lot to repair it: so uncle thought of starting a Fund—Yes! Wasn't it clever of him?—I addressed all the envelopes.

Would you believe it, we couldn't get a single halfpenny! Isn't it a shame?—Such a nice old church, too!

Manson. How was that?

Mary. That's the question! People have been most rude! Oh, the letters we have had! The funny thing is, for all their fault-finding, they none of them agree with each other!—Some say the foundations are all wrong: some don't like the stained glass windows; but if you ask me . . . .

Manson. Yes, what do you think?

Mary. Well, uncle won't hear of it; but I can't help thinking old Bletchley is right . . . .

Manson. Who's he?

Mary. Oh, he's a dreadfully wicked man, I know that—He's the quack doctor in the village: he's—he's *an atheist!* . . . .

Manson. Well, what does he think is the matter?

Mary. He says it's the drain!

Manson. The—the drain? . . . .

Mary. Um! You know, in spite of what uncle says, there *is* a smell: I had it in my nose all last Sunday morning. Up in the choir it's bad enough, and round by the pulpit— Ugh! I can't think how uncle stands it!

That's why the people won't come to church— They *say* so: they stand in the market-place listening to old Bletchley, instead of listening to uncle and trying to be good.

The odd thing is, it must be that very same drain that's causing the trouble in uncle's study— That's his study out there, where they've been digging: it's where he writes his sermons. You know, *I've* noticed the smell for some time, but uncle got so cross whenever I mentioned it, that I learned to hold my tongue. At last, auntie smelt it, too, and that soon brought the men in! Ugh! Perhaps you've . . . .

MANSON. I have! But what has all this to do with . . . .

MARY. Don't get impatient: it's all part of the story. . . . . Well, we thought we should have poor dear Uncle William perfectly ill . . . .

MANSON. Because of the drain? . . . .

MARY. No, because of the Fund. He tried everything: all his rich friends, bazaars, jumble-sales, special intercessions—everything! And nothing seemed to come of it!

Then at last, yesterday morning, he was reading the newspaper, and there was a long piece about the Bishop of Benares. Uncle read it aloud to us. Suddenly, in the middle, he broke off and said: *Look at the power this chap seems to have at the back of him! I wish to God I had some of it!*

He had scarcely said it, when there was a rat-tat at the door: it was the postman; and what do you think? It was a letter from the Bishop of Benares!

MANSON (*anticipating the critics*). What a coincidence!

MARY. Isn't that wonderful? *Isn't* it just like a fairy-tale? Wait a bit. There's more yet . . . . Here's the letter: uncle gave it me for my autographs . . . .

MANSON *takes it and reads it aloud:*

MANSON. "I shall be with you during to-morrow morning. If any one will help me, I will restore your church. Your brother, Joshua."

MARY (*pointing*). And there, do you see, underneath, in brackets: *The Bishop of Benares.*

MANSON. Dear me, dear me, just those few words!

MARY. Wasn't it like an answer to prayer? Auntie saw that at once!

And the odd part about it is, that Uncle William *did* have a brother Joshua who went away and got lost in India years and years ago! And to think that he was *who* he was all the time! To think of him never writing until yesterday! To think that before the day is out he will be sitting down here, perhaps in this very place, just like . . . .

She breaks off suddenly, gazing at him; for his eyes have taken a strange fire.

MANSON. Just like I am now . . . .

MARY (*falteringly*). Yes . . . .

MANSON. Talking to you . . . .

MARY (*rising, afraid*). Oh! . . . .

MANSON (*softly*). Mary . . . .

MARY. Who are you? . . . .

MANSON. I am . . . .

He is interrupted by the great bell of the church, which tolls the Sanctus. Mary crosses herself. After the third stroke, MANSON *continues:*

I am the servant in this house. I have my work to do. Would you like to help me?

MARY. What shall I do?

MANSON. Help to spin the fairy-tale. Will you?

MARY. I will.

MANSON. Then keep the secret—Remember! And wish hard.

MARY. Do you believe in wishing?

MANSON. Everything comes true, if you wish hard enough.

MARY. What shall I wish for?

MANSON. What have you needed most? What have you not had? Think it out.

Enter AUNTIE *in a négligée morning gown. She has a preoccupied air. She carries her husband's coat over her arm.*

AUNTIE. Oh, I heard you had arrived. I hope they gave you something to eat when you came in.

MANSON. Thank you, ma'am: it will do later.

AUNTIE. Mary . . . . Dearest . . . .

MARY. Oh, I beg your pardon, auntie dear, I . . . .

AUNTIE. Dreaming again! (*Putting her arm round her.*) Come, I want you to put your uncle's coat by the fire. He will be cold, coming out of that draughty church.

MARY (*hugging her*). You darling! I believe you think of nobody but uncle in the world!

AUNTIE. And you, sweetheart: you come next—a very near next! Now, run along.

MARY *takes the coat to the fire.*

(*Surveying the table.*) That's very nice, Manson, very nice indeed! Perhaps, just a little further this way. . . . . (*She removes the bowl of flowers.*) My husband is so fond of them. Ye-es; and I *wanted* things *particularly* nice this morning . . . .

MARY (*at the fire, looking up*). I thought you said you—you didn't expect him till twelve-thirty! . . . .

AUNTIE (*absorbed*). Whom?

MARY (*chuckling*). The—the Bishop of Benares.

AUNTIE. The—the . . . . Oh, it's your *uncle* I am . . . . (*To* MANSON). By-the-bye, has the postman been yet?

MANSON (*without looking*). I can see him coming up the lane. He's stopped at the next house.

AUNTIE. Oh, then, Mary: will you very much mind if you don't have breakfast with us this morning? I want to have a private talk with your uncle.

MARY. Oh, auntie, dear! . . . .

AUNTIE. Don't think of yourself, dear— Remember, there are other people in the world besides you. Go down into the village, and have breakfast with poor old Grannie Durden. Take her some nice new-laid eggs and a pat of butter— Poor soul, it would be a charity!

MARY. Oh, auntie, she's as deaf as a post!

AUNTIE. Dearest!—Remember what your uncle said last Sunday about "Pure religion and undefiled!" He mentioned Mrs. Durden only a week ago; but I forgot. Now, run along.

MARY (*reluctantly*). Very well, auntie.

She goes out by the main door.

AUNTIE (*laughing*). Inconsiderate little monkey!

I am glad you have not thought of changing your pretty, native costume, Manson. It is very picturesque; and, besides, today there is a special reason why it may be considered complimentary.

A double knock is heard at the outer door.

Ah! Quick, Manson! The postman!

During his absence, AUNTIE *takes a look at the coat and rearranges the flowers, humming, meanwhile, "The Church's One Foundation."* MANSON *returns with a letter on server.*

MANSON. A letter for you, ma'am.

AUNTIE. Ah! What I expected!

She breaks open the letter and reads it eagerly.

Excellent! (*More dubiously.*) Excellent . . . .

Manson, we shall have to be very busy to-day. There will be quite a Church Congress to lunch—two bishops!

MANSON. Oh, not as bad as that, ma'am!

AUNTIE. Manson!

MANSON. Beg pardon, ma'am; but master mentioned only one—his brother, the Bishop of Benares.

AUNTIE. *My* brother will join us also—the Bishop of Lancashire. This is his letter.

And now let's have breakfast, at once. The vicar is sure to be earlier than he said; and I'm hungry.

MANSON *goes to the door. As he opens it, the* VICAR *and* ROGERS *reappear from the French windows.*

MANSON. Here is master. I'll hurry up the breakfast, ma'am.

VICAR (*entering*). Do, Manson. Let's get it over.

MANSON *goes out.*

Excuse me, my dear.

ROGERS *is helping him off with the cassock.*

So tiresome! Not a place in the house to do anything! Confound the drains! Just run up-stairs for my coat, Rogers.

AUNTIE. It's here, dear. I have it warming for you.

VICAR (*more graciously*). Oh, thank you, Martha. That will do, then, Rogers. Tell Manson to hurry up.

ROGERS *helps him on and goes out. The cassock is left lying on the settee. The* VICAR *crosses moodily to the fireplace.* AUNTIE *stands undecided, watching him, the letter in her hand.*

AUNTIE. You're back early, dear.

VICAR. What can you expect? Not a soul there, of course!

AUNTIE. My poor William! I'm glad I thought to hurry up the breakfast.

VICAR. Thanks, dear. You are always thoughtful.

AUNTIE. William . . . .

He looks up.

I—I want to have a little talk with you.

VICAR. What is it? Any more—worry?

AUNTIE. You needn't make it so.

VICAR. Ah!

AUNTIE. My dearest is not well.

VICAR. I think you are right, Martha. I am *not* well.

AUNTIE (*alarmed*). Not the trouble with your heart again?

VICAR. No; I fancy it goes deeper than that!

AUNTIE. William! What do you mean?

VICAR (*suddenly facing her*). Martha! Do you know the sort of man you have been living with all these years? Do you see through me? Do you know me?—No: don't speak: I see your answer already—Your own love blinds you! Ha! I am a *good man!*—I don't drink, I don't swear, I am respectable, I don't blaspheme like Bletchley! Oh yes, and I am a *scholar:* I can cackle in Greek: I can wrangle about God's name: I know Latin and Hebrew and all the cursed little pedantries of my trade! But do you know what I am? Do you know what your husband is in the sight of God? He is a liar!

AUNTIE. William!

VICAR. A liar! I heard it in my ears as I stood up before Christ's altar in the church this morning, reciting my miserable creed! I heard it in my prayers! I heard it whilst I tasted . . . . whilst I drank . . . . whilst I . . . .

He sinks into a chair, and buries his face in his hands.

AUNTIE. Oh, you are ill!

VICAR (*breaking down*). O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?

She stands above him, hesitating. After a moment, she says, determinedly:

AUNTIE. I know: it's this money trouble. It's what Joshua said in his letter about your having to get somebody to help him. Well, that's just what I wanted to speak to you about. I have a way out of the difficulty.

VICAR. It's not the church. I could wish every stone of it were crumbled into dust!

AUNTIE. William, how wicked of you! . . . .
Is it—is it anything to do with your brother Joshua? Why don't you answer?

VICAR. *It has to do with my brother—Robert.*

AUNTIE. Mary's fa— . . . .
William, did you send him that telegram yesterday?

VICAR. Yes: that was a lie, too!

AUNTIE. Nonsense! Don't be absurd!

VICAR. It was a lie!

AUNTIE. You told him we couldn't do with him because the house was upset: that's true! You told him that the drains were up in the study: that's true!

VICAR. Was that the real reason why we refused to have him here? Was it?

AUNTIE. I can't think what possessed him to write and say he'd come. We've not heard from him for fifteen years!

VICAR. Whose fault is that?

AUNTIE. Why, his own, of course! He can't expect to be treated decently!

She walks up and down with anger.

It's perfectly absurd, it really is, dear, making all this fuss and trouble about a wretched—

Have you told Mary?

VICAR. No: the *silent* lie was comparatively easy!

AUNTIE. My dear, do try and be reasonable. Think of what he is!

VICAR. Isn't he my brother?

AUNTIE. No, he's not your brother—at least, nothing that a brother ought to be! Ridicules everything that you hold sacred! Hates everything you love! Loves everything you hate! . . . .

VICAR. *That's* true!

AUNTIE. A scoffer, an atheist, a miserable drunkard!

VICAR. That was fifteen years ago, remember, after Mary's mother died! . . . .

AUNTIE. A man like that never changes! What would have become of that poor child if we hadn't stepped in? Have you ever dared to tell her what her father's like? Of course not! To-day, too, of all days! It's utterly preposterous!

VICAR. That is all the more reason why . . . .

AUNTIE. My dear, think of his *occupation!*

VICAR. I think the child ought to be told.

AUNTIE. Of his *occupation?*

VICAR. That, and everything.

AUNTIE. My dear, have you gone perfectly mad? Do you know who's coming? Do you want to advertise his *occupation* to all the world?

VICAR. Do you think his brother Joshua would mind that?

AUNTIE. It isn't only your brother Joshua! You think of nobody but your brother Joshua! Some one else is coming.

VICAR. Who?

AUNTIE. My brother James! (*She throws down the letter.*) Now you've heard it all!

There is a long silence. Then the VICAR *speaks in a low, intense voice of bitter contempt.*

VICAR. Your brother James is coming here today? You have brought him here to help my brother Joshua! *Him!*

AUNTIE. Why not? He's rich! He can do it!

VICAR. So, he can recognise me at last!

AUNTIE. It was as much your fault as his, that you have never met! He naturally resented our marriage.

VICAR (*ironically*). But, of course, now that I'm related to the great and *wealthy* Bishop of Benares . . . .

AUNTIE (*warmly*). He's as much a bishop as your brother is!

VICAR. He! That gaitered snob!

AUNTIE. William, how dare you!

VICAR. Yes, he's a bishop! A bishop of stocks and shares! A bishop of the counting-house! A bishop of Mammon!

AUNTIE. William!

VICAR. The devil's own bishop!

AUNTIE. At least, he isn't a working-man!

VICAR (*as though stung*). Ah! . . . .

They stand below the table, one on either side, tense with passion. They remain so.

MANSON *and* ROGERS *come in with the breakfast.* ROGERS *goes out immediately.*

MANSON. Sorry to have delayed, sir; but you said a quarter to nine, didn't you, sir?

VICAR. Yes.

MANSON. Breakfast's served, ma'am. It's served, sir.

They move to the table, absently, first one, then the other, as he goes to each separately.

MANSON *serves them in silence for a few moments.*

Beg pardon, sir: what time did you expect the Bishop of Benares?

VICAR. Oh!—*During the morning*, he said. That will mean the twelve-thirty, I suppose. It's the only convenient service.

MANSON. And the Bishop of Lancashire, ma'am?

AUNTIE. He didn't say; but I think we may expect him by the same train. He would scarcely think of catching the . . . .

There is heard a loud ringing of the bell—a bishop at the very least. All three heads turn automatically.

Good gracious! Already!

MANSON. It doesn't sound like the Bishop of Benares, ma'am. He generally comes very quietly.

AUNTIE. Quick!

MANSON. Yes, ma'am.

He goes out by the main door.

AUNTIE (*rapidly*). William, I'm sorry! Really, I didn't mean you: I never thought of you: I was only thinking of Robert. I only think of you as a great scholar and a saint—yes, you are one!—and as the man I love! I would sacrifice everything to your happiness. Robert's nothing to me: that's why I . . . . Think of what it might mean to Mary—we must think of others, William!—our own little child as we try to imagine . . . .

The VICAR *makes a gesture of anguish.*

As for James, God knows I did it for the best. I love you, my dear, I love you: I wouldn't have vexed you for the world! After all, he *is* my brother, William! . . . . I thought of patching up the enmity between you: I thought of all your hopes of rebuilding the church; and James was the only rich man I thought might be induced—under the circumstances . . . .

VICAR. I am in the darkness. I don't know what to do. God has left me stranded.

MANSON *re-enters. They look at him inquiringly.*

MANSON. It isn't the Bishop of Benares, ma'am.

AUNTIE. Well, who is it?

MANSON. I didn't ask his name, ma'am.

AUNTIE. T-t-t! How is he dressed?

MANSON. Rather oddly, ma'am: I noticed that his legs . . . .

AUNTIE. William, it's James! I can't be seen like this. Show him in. I can slip out this way.

MANSON *goes out.*

William, try and treat him like . . . .

VICAR. How? Like a brother?

AUNTIE. I was going to say, like a Priest and a Christian, William.

VICAR. Like a Christian, then.

AUNTIE. My dear!

She goes out by the door to the right, as MANSON *is heard at the other door.*

MANSON. This way, if you please.

The VICAR *braces himself up and makes an effort at cordiality.*

VICAR. Just in time for breakfast, my lord.

But it is ROBERT SMITH *whom* MANSON *ushers in.* ROBERT *is a navvy, and looks it. His knees are tied with string.*

ROBERT (*grimly*). Thanks, Bill Awlmighty, don't mind if I do. My belly's fair aching.

VICAR. Robert!

ROBERT. Yus, it's me, my 'oly brother!

VICAR. Didn't you—didn't you get my wire?

ROBERT. Yus, I gorit: *Drains wrong*, eh? Thought I'd like to 'av' a look at 'em—my job, yer know, *drains!* So you'll excuse the togs: remind you of old days, eh what?

VICAR. Robert, what have you come here for?

ROBERT. *You* arsk me that?

VICAR. Yes, I do, Bob . . . .

ROBERT. Why, to see my little gel, o' course—Gawd curse you! . . . .
Now go an tell your ole woman.

The VICAR *stands as though stricken.*

Did you 'ear me speak? Tell 'er!

The VICAR *wavers a moment, and then staggers out silently through the door, right.* ROBERT *watches him off with a look of iron. He pays no heed to* MANSON, *who stands quite close to him, on the left.*

See that blighter? That's the bloke as was born with no bowels! 'E might a-made a man o' me once, if 'e'd tried; but 'e didn't—'im and 'is like. Hm! Dam foolish, I call it, don't you?

MANSON. Yes: foolish and—damned!

ROBERT *turns and looks into his face for the first time.*

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the First Act.

THE SECOND ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. Presently ROBERT, *having completed his inspection of the other's face and costume, moves away with a characteristic interjection.*

ROBERT. Oh, Jeeroosalem! . . . . 'Ere, 'elp us orf, comride: I'm wet through. Rainin' cats an' dorgs dahn at the Junction! 'Ere, I cawn't . . . . Wot oh! The very identical! . . . .

> MANSON *has helped him off with his coat, and now hands him the cassock.*

(*Getting into it.*) Don't know oo you are, ole pal; but you're a bit of orl right! . . . . Don't I look a corfdrop? 'Ere, where ye teking it to? . . . .

> *He watches* MANSON *suspiciously as he places his coat before the fire to dry.*

Bit 'andy, ain't yer? . . . . So this is where 'e lives! A bloomin' palace, as never I *did* see! . . . .

> MANSON *prepares a place for him at the table.*

Right you are, ole comride! 'E said breakfast, an' breakfast it shall be, I don't fink! Blimey! Sossingers! Ain't 'ad the taste of sossingers in my gizzard for I don't know 'ow long!

> *He sits and devours while* MANSON *waits upon him.*

(*Between bites.*) Wouldn't think as I was 'is brother, would yer—not to look at me? But strooth, *I am;* an' wot's more, 'e cawn't deny it! . . . . (*He labors with a little* *joke.*) There's a lot o' brothers knockin' abaht as people don't know on, eh what? See wot I mean? (*Suddenly serious.*) Not as I'm one o' them sort, mind yer: my father married my mother honest, same as I married my little . . . .

After a moment's reflection, he makes fresh onslaught upon the sausages. Presently he looks up.

'Ere, ain't you goin' ter 'av' none? . . . .
Cawn't yer speak?

MANSON. Yes.

ROBERT. Well, why cawn't yer arnser a bloke when 'e arsks yer civil?

MANSON. You didn't make it clear that you wanted to eat with me.

ROBERT. Want a bit of 'eart in it, eh?

MANSON. Yes, that's all.

ROBERT (*largely*). Sit dahn, ole pal! Mek yourself at 'ome!

MANSON *obeys.*

See, wot was I tawkin' abaht, just afore you turned narsty?

MANSON. You were going to say something about—your little girl's mother.

ROBERT'S *cutlery bristles up like bayonets.*

ROBERT. Look 'ere, mate, don't you come tryin' it on with me! I don't care *oo* you are!

MANSON. I know that.

ROBERT. Then let me be, I tell yer! You tek all the taste out o' my sossingers.

MANSON. I should like to hear about her, comrade.

ROBERT. *You* cawn't bring 'er back. She's dead.

MANSON. What was her name?

ROBERT. Mary—same as the little gel's.

MANSON. I wonder whether they are anything alike.

ROBERT. That's wot I come to see! . . . .
She 'ad 'er mother's nose when she was a biby—*and* 'er eyes! Gorstrike, she was the very spit—far as a biby could be! . . . . Swelp me Moses, if I find 'er anything like Bill's ole geezer, I'll cut 'er throat!

MANSON. And if she's like her mother? What then?

ROBERT. Why, then . . . . there's allus my own. I nearly did it once.

MANSON (*after a pause*). How did you come to lose her?

ROBERT (*roughly*). Never you mind!

MANSON. How did you come to lose her?

ROBERT (*sullenly*). Typhoid fever.

MANSON *notes the evasion with a glance.* ROBERT *wriggles under his gaze, and at last says, reluctantly:*

Oh, it was my own fault, as I lost *the kid!*

MANSON. That was a sore loss, comrade.

ROBERT. *I* know it! Needn't rub it in! . . . .
Look 'ere, comride, I 'adn't a bad nature to begin with. Didn't me an' my brother Joshua pinch an' slave the skin orf our bones to send that spotted swine to school? Didn't we 'elp 'im out with 'is books an' 'is mortar-boards an'

'is bits of clothes to try an' mek 'im look respectable? That's wot *we* did, till 'e got 'is lousy scholyships, an' run away to get spliced with that she-male pup of a blood-'ound! Cos why? Cos we was proud of the little perisher!—proud of 'is 'ead-piece! We 'adn't gone none ourselves—leastways, *I* 'adn't: Joshua was different to me; and now . . . .

MANSON. And your brother Joshua: what of him? Where is *he* now?

ROBERT. *I* don't know—gone to pot, like me! P'r'aps eatin' is bleedin' 'eart out, same as I am, at the base ingratitood of the world!

MANSON. Perhaps so!

ROBERT. Where was I? You mek me lose my 'air, shoving in with your bit!

MANSON. You were saying that you hadn't a bad nature to begin with.

ROBERT (*truculently*). No more I 'adn't! . . . . O' course, when she took an'—an' died, things was different: I couldn't 'old up the same— Some'ow, I don't know, I lost my 'eart, and . . . .

MANSON. Yes? . . . .

ROBERT. That's 'ow I come to lose my kid, my little kid . . . . Mind you, that was fifteen years ago: I was a rotter then, same as you might be. I wasn't 'arf the man I am now . . . .

You can larf! A man can change a lot in fifteen years!

MANSON. *I* didn't laugh.

ROBERT. Do you want to know wot's come over me since then? I *work*—and work well: that's more than some of 'em can say— And I don't get much money for it, either! That ought to mek 'em feel ashamed! I'm not the drunkard I was—not by 'arf! If I'm bitter, oo's made me bitter? You cawn't be very sweet and perlite on eighteen bob a week—*when yer get it!* I'll tell yer summat else: I've eddicated myself since then—I'm not the gory fool I was—*And* they know it! They can't come playin' the 'anky with us, same as they used to! It's "Nice Mister Working-man This and Nice Mister Working-man That, will yer be so 'ighly hobliging as to 'and over your dear little voting-paper"—you poor, sweet, muddy-nosed old idiot, as can't spot your natural enemy when yer see 'im! That orter mek some on 'em sit up!

Fifteen years ago me an' my like 'adn't got a religion! By Gawd, we 'av' one now! Like to 'ear wot it is?

MANSON. Yes.

ROBERT. Socialism! Funny, ain't it?

MANSON. *I* don't think so. It's mine, too.

ROBERT. I believe in fighting with my clarss!

MANSON. Oh, against whom?

ROBERT. Why, agin all the other clarsses—curse 'em!

MANSON. Isn't that a bit of the old Robert left, comrade?

ROBERT. Oh, leave me alone. I cawn't be allus pickin' an' choosin' my words! I ain't no scholar—thank Gawd!

MANSON. All the same, I'm right, eh, comrade? Comrade . . . .

ROBERT (*grudgingly*). Well, yus! (*Savagely.*) Yus, I tell yer! Cawn't a bloke speak 'otter than 'e means without *you* scrapin' at 'is innards?

(*Exploding again.*) Wait till I set eyes on that bleedin' brother of mine again, that's all!

MANSON. Which bleeding brother?

ROBERT (*with a thumb-jerk*). Why, *'im*, o' course! (*Sneering.*) The Reverend William! 'Im as you said was damned! . . . . Allus did 'ate parsons! I 'ates the sight of their 'arf-baked, silly mugs!

There is a very loud ringing of the bell.

'Ello! 'Ello! Did I mek a row like that?

MANSON. You tried, didn't you?

ROBERT. So I did, not 'arf! Thought if I kicked up an 'ell of a shindy they'd think some big bug was comin'; and then when they'd be all smiles an' bowin' an' scrapin', in pops me, real low!

ROGERS *enters. On seeing them at the table, he is apparently troubled with his inside.*

ROGERS. Oh, my 'oly Evings!

MANSON. Who is it, Rogers?

ROGERS (*awed*). It's the Bishop of Lancashire!

MANSON (*imperturbably*). Show him in, Rogers.

ROGERS. Beg pardon, Mr. Manson . . . .

MANSON. I said, show him in. Quick, Rogers. Keep a bishop waiting!

ROGERS. Well, I'm jiggered!

He is; and goes out.

ROBERT. 'Ere! Did 'e say *bishop?*

MANSON. Yes.

ROBERT. Comin' 'ere? Now? Well, I ain't agoin' ter leave my sossingers, not if 'e was a bloomin' archangel, see!

> ROGERS, *still jiggered, ushers in* JAMES PONSONBY MAKESHYFTE, D.D., *the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Lancashire. He looks his name, his goggles and ear-trumpet lending a beautiful perfection to the resemblance.*

> MANSON *has risen;* ROBERT, *imperturbable, discusses sossingers;* ROGERS, *with a last excruciation of his ailment, vanishes.*

> The RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD *stands blinking for recognition. Pained at the non-fulfilment of this worthy expectation, he moves—a little blindly—toward the table. Here he encounters the oppugnant back of the voracious* ROBERT, *who grows quite annoyed. Indeed, he as good as says so.*

'Ere, where ye comin' to?

> *And he digs him in the stomach.*

BISHOP (*peering closely into his face, the other edging away*). Ah! Mr. Smythe, or I am mistaken.

ROBERT. Smith's my name! Don't you call me Smythe!

BISHOP. My dear sir, don't mention it: my sister has explained everything. I bear you no grudge—none whatever!

ROBERT. What's the silly old josser jawin' abaht now?

BISHOP. But I perceive that I have—er—(*sniffing*) disturbed you at your morning meal . . . .

ROBERT (*with conviction*). You 'av' that!

BISHOP. Eh? . . . .

ROBERT (*louder*). I say, you 'av'!

BISHOP (*fixing his ear-trumpet*). Just once more please . . . .

ROBERT. Oh, Moses! (*Roaring, and indicating his breakfast.*) You 'av', blarst you!

BISHOP (*mistaking the gesticulation*). Thank you, you are very kind. I think I will. I could get nothing on the journey but a cup of coffee and a bun.

He sits at the table without ever having perceived MANSON, *who has nevertheless been serving him.*

ROBERT. Yus, you look as if you fed on buns!

BISHOP (*eating, and at the same time addressing the becassocked* ROBERT). And you must not think, on account of the little coolness between us, that I have not followed your career with great interest—very great interest! Your scholastic achievements have been most praiseworthy—especially under the unfortunate circumstances. . . . . Although, by-the-way, I cannot at all agree with your gloss on Romans fourteen, twenty-three: *Katakekritai* either means *damned* or nothing at all.

ROBERT (*gesticulating*). It was '*im* as said *damned!*

BISHOP. No, no, sir: it is perfectly indefensible!

ROBERT. I'll use what langwidge I like!

BISHOP (*warming*). You said *katakekritai* . . . .

Robert. I never did, *I* tek my oath!

Bishop. My dear sir, I learned my Greek at Shrewsbury, before you were born! Don't argue, sir!

Robert. Oo is argufying? . . . . Talking to me about yer Katama-what-d'you-call-it!

Bishop. We had better drop the subject! . . . . Bœotian! After all, it is not precisely the matter which has brought us together. And that reminds me . . . . (*Trumpet.*) Has he come yet?

Robert. Oo?

Bishop. Your brother, of course.

Robert. My brother! Oh, you'll see *'im* soon enough!

Bishop. I gather from your remark that he has not arrived yet. Good! The fact is, I should like a preliminary discussion with yourself before meeting your illustrious brother.

Robert. Then you'd better look slippy!

Bishop. I beg your pardon? . . . .

Robert (*with a flap at the trumpet*). Go on: you 'eard.

Bishop. Of course, the *financial* undertaking is considerable: it's not like an *investment*, where there is some reasonable hope of a return: it's merely a matter of charity! The money's—gone, so to speak.

Robert. Yus, I've noticed that about money, myself.

Bishop. At the same time, I should like my *name* to be associated with your brother's, in so worthy an enterprise . . . .

Robert (*mildly sarcastic*). You don't say!

BISHOP. And then again, I *trust*—I say I *trust*—I am not impervious to the more sacred obligations involved; but . . . .

He gropes blindly for bread.

ROBERT. I allus notice that sort of 'igh talk ends with a "but" . . . .

BISHOP. Naturally, I should like to learn a little, beforehand, of your brother's *views*. From what I gather, they are not altogether likely to coincide with my own. Of course, he is an idealist, a dreamer. Now, under these circumstances, perhaps . . . .

Eh, what— Oh! Bless my soul!

MANSON *has been offering him bread for some time. He has just tumbled to the fact of his presence. He rises.*

My—my Brother from Benares, I presume?

ROBERT. What, *my* pal, '*is* brother! Oh, Je'oshaphat!

BISHOP. Ten thousand pardons! Really, my eyesight is deplorable! Delighted to meet you! . . . .

I was just observing to our charming host that—er—Humph! . . . .

Bless me! Now what *was* I . . . .

MANSON. Something about your sacred obligations, I believe.

BISHOP. May I trouble you again?

MANSON *gravely fixes the ear-trumpet in his ear.*

ROBERT. That's right: stick the damned thing in 'is ear-'ole, comride!

MANSON (*through the trumpet*). Your sacred obligations.

BISHOP. Precisely, precisely! Er— Shall we sit?

They do so.

Well—er—speaking of that, of course, my dearly-beloved brother, I feel very seriously on the matter, *very* seriously—as I am sure you do. The restoration of a church is a tremendous, an overwhelming responsibility. To begin with, it—it costs quite a lot. Doesn't it?

MANSON. It does: quite a lot.

BISHOP. Hm, yes—yes! . . . . You mentioned *sacred obligations* just now, and I think that on the whole I am inclined to agree with you. It is an admirable way of putting it. We must awaken people to a sense of their *sacred obligations*. This is a work in which everybody can do something: the rich man can give of the abundance with which it has pleased Providence specially to favor him: the poor man with his slender savings need have no fear for the poverty of his gift— Let him give all: it will be accepted. Those of us who, like yourself, my dear brother—and I say it in all modesty, perhaps *my*self—are in possession of the endowments of learning, of influence, of authority—we can lend our *names* to the good work. As you say so very beautifully: *sacred obligations*.

By-the-way, I don't think I quite caught your views as to the probable cost. Eh, what do you think?

MANSON. I think that should depend upon the obligations; and then, of course, the sacredness might count for something.

BISHOP. Yes, yes, we've discussed all that. But bringing it down to a *practical* basis: how much could we manage with?

MANSON. What do you say to—everything you have?

BISHOP. My dear sir, I'm not talking about myself!

MANSON. Well—everything the others have?

BISHOP. My dear sir, they're not fools! Do discuss the matter like a man of the world!

MANSON. *God's not watching: let's give as little, and grab as much as we can!*

BISHOP. Ssh! My dear brother! Remember who's present! (*He indicates* ROBERT.) However . . . . (*Coughs.*) We will return to this later. I begin to understand you.

ROBERT. Yus: you *think* you do! (*And he coughs too.*)

BISHOP. At the same time, I do think we ought to come to some general understanding: we must count the cost. Now, from all accounts, *you* have had some experience of church-building out in India—not that I think the extravagance for which you are credited would be either possible or desirable in this country—oh, no! Thank God, we know how to worship in spirit and in truth, without the aid of expensive buildings! However, I should like to hear your views. How did you manage it?

MANSON. Sacrifice.

BISHOP. Of course, of course; but *practically*. They say it's an enormous concern!

MANSON. So it is.

BISHOP. Well, what would such an establishment as that represent? In round numbers, now?

MANSON (*calmly*). Numberless millions.

BISHOP. Numberless mil . . . . (*He drops his fork.*) My dear sir, absurd! . . . . Why, the place must be a palace—fit for a king!

MANSON. It is!

BISHOP. Do you mean to tell me that one man alone, on his own naked credit, could obtain numberless millions for such an object as that? How could you possibly get them together?

MANSON. They came freely from every quarter of the world.

BISHOP. On the security of your own name alone?

MANSON. No other, I assure you.

BISHOP. For Heaven's sake, tell me all about it! What sort of a place is it?

MANSON (*seriously*). Are you quite sure you can hear?

BISHOP. Perhaps your voice is *not* quite so clear as it was. However . . . .

He blows through the ear-trumpet, wipes it, and fixes it afresh.

Now! Tell me about your church.

MANSON (*very simply*). I am afraid you may not consider it an altogether substantial concern. It has to be seen in a certain way, under certain conditions. Some people never *see* it at all. You must understand, this is no dead pile of stones and unmeaning timber. It is a living thing.

BISHOP (*in a hoarse whisper, no longer listening*). Numberless millions!

MANSON. When you enter it you hear a sound—a sound as of some mighty poem chanted. Listen long enough, and you will learn that it is made up of the beating of human hearts, of the nameless music of men's souls—that is, if you have ears. If you have eyes, you will presently see the church itself—a looming mystery of many shapes and shadows, leaping sheer from floor to dome. The work of no ordinary builder!

Bishop. On the security of one man's name!

Manson. The pillars of it go up like the brawny trunks of heroes: the sweet human flesh of men and women is molded about its bulwarks, strong, impregnable: the faces of little children laugh out from every corner-stone: the terrible spans and arches of it are the joined hands of comrades; and up in the heights and spaces there are inscribed the numberless musings of all the dreamers of the world. It is yet building—building and built upon. Sometimes the work goes forward in deep darkness: sometimes in blinding light: now beneath the burden of unutterable anguish: now to the tune of a great laughter and heroic shoutings like the cry of thunder. (*Softer.*) Sometimes, in the silence of the night-time, one may hear the tiny hammerings of the comrades at work up in the dome—the comrades that have climbed ahead.

There is a short silence, broken only by the champing jaws of the Bishop, *who has resumed his sausages.* Robert *speaks first.*

Robert. I think I begin to understand you, comride: especially that bit abaht . . . . (*his eyes stray upward*) . . . . the 'ammerins' an' the—the harches—an' . . . . Humph! I'm only an 'og! . . . .

S'pose there's no drain 'ands wanted in that there church o' yours?

Manson. Drains are a very important question there at present.

ROBERT. Why, I'd be cussin' over every stinkin' pipe I laid.

MANSON. I should make that a condition, comrade.

> ROBERT, *rising, pulls off the cassock, fetches his coat from the fire, returns, dragging it on, then pauses.*

ROBERT. I don't know! Things 'av' got in a bit of a muck with me! I'm rather like a drain-pipe myself. (*With sudden inspiration.*) There's one thing I *can* do!

MANSON. What's that?

ROBERT. Renahnce ole Beelzebub an' all 'is bloomin' wirks! 'And us that brarss-band!

> *He alludes to the ear-trumpet. Snatching it up, he jabs it into the ear of the* BISHOP, *who seems quite surprised.*

'Ere! 'Av' you ever 'eard of 'ell?

BISHOP. Of what?

ROBERT. 'Ell. *H, E,* double *L,* 'ell.

BISHOP. Well, my dear sir, I think I ought to!

ROBERT. Then, go there! Aymen . . . .
Now I'll go an' 'av' a look at our Bill's drains, damn 'is eyes!

> *And with a wink at* MANSON, *he lumbers through the main door, more or less repentant.*

BISHOP. The scoundrel! Did you hear what he said? I shall certainly report him to his bishop!

MANSON. I don't think I should. *His* bishop doesn't mind a little plain speech now and again.

Bishop. A little plain speech! Do you think it's right for a clergyman to—to direct me to perdition?

Manson. I think you are making a mistake: the man who gave you your—direction is not a clergyman. He's a scavenger.

Bishop. A scavenger!

Manson. Yes—looks after drains.

Bishop. Do you mean to tell me that I've been sitting down to breakfast with a common working-man?

Manson. Yes; have you never done that before?

Bishop. My dear sir, whatever do you take me for?

Manson. A bishop of God's church.

Bishop. Precisely! Is it *your* custom to breakfast with working-men?

Manson. Every morning. You see, I'm prejudiced: I was one myself, once.

Bishop. You? . . . .

Manson. Yes—a long time ago, though: people have forgotten.

Bishop. But, my dear brother, I am perfectly sure you never told people to go to . . . .

Manson. Oh yes, quite frequently: it would shock you to learn the language I really did use. Perhaps, under the circumstances, it might be advisable to drop the subject at this point.

Bishop (*emphatically*). I most certainly agree with you there! After all, it is a digression from the purpose for which we are here! . . . .

Let me see, then: where were we? . . . . Oh yes, I remember— Although, by the way, it was very ill-advised of you to speak your mind so openly in that man's presence! However . . . .

To resume our—how shall I call it?—our—little understanding, eh?

Manson. That describes it most accurately.

Bishop. Now, you said, "Let's give as little, and grab as much as we can." Of course, that is a playful way of putting it; but between ourselves, it expresses my sentiments exactly.

Manson. I knew that when I said it.

Bishop (*delighted*). My dear brother, your comprehension makes my heart warm. I trust our relations may always remain as warm.

Manson. Oh, warmer, warmer!

Bishop. Very well then, to business! I tell you, candidly, I agree with you, that there is no necessity for sinking anything of our own in the concern: nothing ever comes of that sort of reckless generosity! If people want a church, let them make some sacrifice for it! Why should *we* do anything?

I am sure you will appreciate my candor?

Manson. At its full value. Go on.

Bishop. At the same time, there is no reason why we should throw cold water upon the project. On the contrary, we might promote it, encourage it, even lend it the influence of our patronage and our names. *But on one understanding!*

Manson. And that?

BISHOP. That it is extended—imperialised, so to speak: that it is made the vehicle of a much vaster, of a much more momentous project behind it!

MANSON. You interest me intensely. Explain.

BISHOP. I will.

He looks around to assure himself that they are alone.

There is in existence a society, a very influential society, in which I happen to have an interest—very great interest. Hm! I am one of the directors.

I may say that it is already very well established, financially; but it is always open to consider the—extension of its influence in that way.

MANSON. And the name of the society?

BISHOP. Rather long, but I trust explicit. It is called "The Society for the Promotion and Preservation of Emoluments for the Higher Clergy."

MANSON. I do not seem to have heard it *named* before.

BISHOP. Well, no: its movements have always been characterized by a certain modesty. It is an invisible society, so to speak; but I can assure you its principles are very clearly understood—among the parties most concerned.

MANSON. And your project?

BISHOP. Affiliate the subsidiary question of the building of the Church with the larger interests of the Society.

MANSON. Yes, but since people have already refused to subscribe to the more trivial project . . . .

Bishop. They have not been properly approached. My dear sir, in order to awaken public generosity, it is necessary to act like men of the world: *we must have names.* People will subscribe to any amount, if you can only get the right names.

That is where *you* come in.

Manson. I! Do you propose to place *my* name at the head of your—prospectus?

Bishop. My dear sir, invaluable! Didn't you say yourself that you brought in numberless millions, on your own credit, out there in India? Why shouldn't you do the same in England? Think of your reputation, your achievements, your name for sanctity— Not a word, sir: I *mean* it! . . . . Why, there's no end to the amount it would bring in: it would mean billions!

Well, what do you say?

Manson. Let us clearly understand one another. I am to lend you my name—just my name—and you are to do all the rest.

Bishop (*quickly*). Oh yes: I'd *rather* you kept out of the business negotiations!

Manson. It is rather a dangerous name to play with!

Bishop. I take that responsibility entirely upon myself!

Manson. And when all's over and done with, what are we going to gain out of the transaction?

Bishop. We shall have to come to some private settlement between ourselves.

Manson. When?

Bishop. Oh, hereafter.

MANSON. Hereafter, then.

AUNTIE *and* VICAR *enter from the drawing-room.*

AUNTIE (*off*). Leave him to me, William! I'll soon settle the matter! (*Entering.*) The man must be possessed of some evil spirit! . . . .

Why—it's my brother James! . . . .

MANSON *is now once more the perfect servant.*

MANSON. Your sister and the vicar, my lord.

BISHOP. Ah! Well, Martha! —No, no, no, if you please! (*He restrains her approach.*) Observe the retribution of an unchastened will. You have never seen my face for sixteen years! However, like a cloud, I blot out your transgressions from this hour!

And so this is your husband?—Not a word, sir; not a single word!—the sausages were delicious, and your place has been most agreeably occupied by your brother!

VICAR. My brother! Then you . . . . What do you mean?

BISHOP (*testily*). I mean what I say, sir! Your brother, *my* brother, *our* brother here, of course, our Oriental brother!

AUNTIE. James, you are making a mistake: this is our new butler—our *Indian* butler.

BISHOP. Your Indian—what?

He falls into a chair and cogitates horribly until the end of the act.

AUNTIE. What has made him like this? He seems possessed!

Manson. He is! . . . .
I have just been having some trouble with *another* devil, ma'am.

Auntie. Meaning, of course . . . . What has become of him?

Manson (*with his eye*). *He* is cast out forever.

Auntie. Where is he now?

Manson. He walks through dry places seeking—(*he probes her soul*)—*other* habitations.

Auntie. Manson! This is your doing! Oh, you have saved us!

Manson. I am trying to, ma'am; but, God knows, you make it rather difficult!

A change comes over her face as she turns away from him. She dares not meet his eyes.

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Second Act.

THE THIRD ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged; but attention now centers in the Bishop, *who struggles apoplectically for speech.*

Bishop (*bursting*). Before we proceed a step further, I have a most extraordinary request to make! The fact is, you interrupted me in the middle of a most engrossing spiritual discussion with my . . . . that is to say, with your . . . . in short, *with that person standing over there!* My request is that I be permitted a few minutes further conversation with him—alone, and at once!

All. } (*together*) { With Manson! . . . .
Manson. } { With me! . . . .

Bishop. Not a word! I know my request will appear singular—most singular! But I assure you it is most necessary. The peace, the security of a human soul depends upon it! Come, sir! Where shall we go?

Manson. Have I your permission, ma'am?

Auntie. Certainly; but it is most extraordinary!

Manson (*crossing*). Then I think this way, my lord, in the drawing-room . . . .

Bishop (*following*). And you may be sure, my good fellow, I will give anything—I say, anything—to remedy your misapprehensions! Hm!

They go into the drawing-room, right, Manson *holding the door for the other to pass.*

Vicar. Martha! It's no use! I can't do it!

AUNTIE (*preoccupied*). Can't do what, William?

VICAR. Behave towards that man like a Christian! He stirs some nameless devil like murder in my heart! I want to clutch him by the throat, as I would some noisome beast, and strangle him!

AUNTIE (*slowly*). He is greatly changed!

VICAR. It is you who have changed, Martha. You see him now with different eyes.

AUNTIE. Do I? I wonder! . . . .

VICAR. After all, why should we invite him here? Why should we be civil to him? What possible kinship can there be between us? As for his filthy money—how did he scrape it together? How did he come by it? . . . .

AUNTIE. Yes, William, that's true, but the opportunity of turning it to God's service . . . .

VICAR. Do you think any blessing is going to fall upon a church whose every stone is reeking with the bloody sweat and anguish of the human creatures whom the wealth of men like that has driven to despair? Shall we base God's altar in the bones of harlots, plaster it up with the slime of sweating-dens and slums, give it over for a gaming-table to the dice of gamblers and of thieves?

AUNTIE. Why will you exaggerate, my dear?— It is not as bad as that. Why don't you compose yourself and try and be contented and—and happy?

VICAR. How can I be happy, and that man poisoning the air I breathe?

AUNTIE. You are not always like this, dear! . . . .

VICAR. Happy! How can I be happy, and my brother Robert what I have made him!

AUNTIE. We are not talking of Robert: we are talking of *you!* Think of our love, William—our great and beautiful love! Isn't that something to make you happy?

VICAR. Our love? It's well you mention it. That question had better be faced, too! Our love! Well, what of it? What is love?

AUNTIE. Oh, William, you *know* . . . .

VICAR. Is love a murderer? Does love go roaming about the world like Satan, to slay men's souls?

AUNTIE. Oh, now you're exaggerating again! What do you mean?

VICAR. I mean my brother Robert! What has love done for him?

AUNTIE. Oh, Robert, Robert—I'm sick to death of Robert! Why can't you think of yourself?

VICAR. Well, I will! What has love done for *me?*

AUNTIE. William! . . . .

VICAR. Do you remember that day when I first came to you and told you of my love? Did I lie to you? Did I try to hide things? Did I despise my birth? Did *you?*

AUNTIE. No, no, William, I loved you: I told you so.

VICAR. Did you mind the severance from your family because of me?

AUNTIE. Didn't I always say that I was proud to be able to give up so much for you, William? . . . .

VICAR. Yes, and then what followed? Having given up so much for me, what followed?

AUNTIE. My dear, circumstances were too strong for us! Can't you see? *You* were not made to live out your life in any little odd hole and corner of the world! There was your reputation, your fame: you began to be known as an author, a scholar, a wonderful preacher— All this required position, influence, social prestige. You don't think I was ambitious for myself: it was for *you*.

VICAR. For *me*—yes! And how do you imagine I have benefited by all your scheming, your contriving, your compromising, your . . . .

AUNTIE. In the way I willed! I am glad of it! I worked for that—*and I won!* . . . .

Well, what are you troubling about now?

VICAR (*slowly*). I am thinking of the fact that there has been no child to bless our marriage, Martha—that is, no child of our very own, no child whose love we have not stolen.

AUNTIE. My dear . . . .

VICAR. We have spoken about it sometimes, haven't we? Or, rather—*not* spoken!

AUNTIE. William, why will you think of these things?

VICAR. In those first days, dearest, I brought you two children of our own to cherish, little unborn souls crying for you to mother them— You have fostered only the one. That one is called the Scholar. Shall I tell you the name of the other?

AUNTIE (*after a moment*). Yes . . . .

VICAR. I hardly know: I hardly dare to name him; but perhaps it was—the Saint.

AUNTIE. What I have done, William, has been done for love of you—you only—you only in the world!

VICAR. Yes: that's what I *mean!*

The thought troubles her for a moment; then she paces up and down in agitated rebellion.

AUNTIE. No! I can't believe it! I can't think that love is as wrong as you say!

VICAR. Love is a spirit of many shapes and shadows: a spirit of fire and darkness—a minister of heaven and hell: sometimes I think the very damned know love—in a way. It can inform men's souls with the gladness of high archangels, or possess them with the despair of devils!

She is suddenly struck by the echo in his last phrase.

AUNTIE. Possess! . . . .

VICAR. Yes? . . . .

AUNTIE. I was wondering . . . . Wondering what Manson meant just now.

VICAR. When?

AUNTIE. When he spoke about your brother Robert.

VICAR. I think he made it clear. He said we were—rid of him forever!

AUNTIE (*thoughtfully*). Ye-es . . . . William, I begin to fear that man.

VICAR. Whom—Robert?

AUNTIE. No, Manson.

MANSON *re-enters from the drawing-room. He carries a five-pound note in his hand.*

MANSON. His lordship will be glad to see you.

AUNTIE. Very well, Manson. Why, what have you there?

MANSON. A remedy for misapprehension, ma'am.

AUNTIE. It's a five-pound note.

MANSON. Yes.

AUNTIE. Come, William.

She makes for the drawing-room, her head anxiously turned toward MANSON.

VICAR (*at the door*). What are we going to do, Martha?

AUNTIE. I don't know: God help me, I can't see the way!

They both go out, MANSON *watching them. He then moves up to the fire, and burns the five-pound note. He watches the flames leap up as he speaks.*

MANSON. "Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother: thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."

He comes to the middle of the room. MARY *enters eagerly. Seeing him alone, she gives a little cry of gladness.*

MARY. Oh, how jolly! Where are they?

MANSON. In the next room.

MARY. Ah! Ah!

She comes to his outstretched arms.

Isn't it a great secret? What shall I call you, now we are alone?

MANSON. Ssh! They may hear you!

MARY. If I whisper . . . .

MANSON. They are very near! . . . .
(*Disengaging himself.*) I must be about my business. Is this the bell to the kitchen?

MARY. Yes. Let me help you.

MANSON *having rung the bell, they begin to remove the breakfast things.* MARY *employs herself with the crumb-scoop.*

If auntie and uncle could see me now! If they only knew! I've kept the secret: I've told nobody! . . . .
These will do for the birds. Look, I'll take them now. Poor little mites!

She throws the crumbs out of the French windows and returns to the table.

MANSON. You are fond of the birds?

MARY. Just love them! Don't you?

MANSON. They are my very good friends. Now, take the cassock. Fold it up and put it on the chair.

While he gives this command ROGERS *enters with a tray.*

ROGERS. Well, I'm . . . . 'Owever, it's no business of mine!

MARY (*brightly*). What's up with you, Rogers?

ROGERS (*with reservation*). Nuthin', miss.

MARY. Then why look so solemn?

ROGERS (*lugubriously*). Ain't lookin' solemn, miss.

MANSON. Hold up the tray, Rogers.

ROGERS. *Am* 'oldin' it up, Mr. Manson.

MARY (*loading it*). I'm sure there *is* something the matter!

ROGERS. Well, since you arsk me, miss, it's the goin's on in this 'ouse! I never see such a complicyted mass of mysteries and improbabilities in my life! I shall 'av' to give in my notice!

MARY. Oh, Rogers, that would be dreadful! Why?

MANSON. Now the cloth, Mary . . . .

ROGERS. Cos why? *That's* why!—What you're doin' now! I likes people to keep their proper stytion! I was brought up middle-clarss myself, an' taught to be'ave myself before my betters!—No offence to *you*, Mr. Manson!

He says this with a jib, belying his words.

MARY. Nonsense, Rogers! I like helping.

ROGERS. My poor farver taught me. 'E led a godly, righteous, an' sober life. 'E was a grocer.

MANSON. Come, Rogers. Take them to the kitchen.

ROGERS *obeys with some asperity of mien. At the door he delivers a Parthian shot.*

ROGERS. If my poor farver could see what I've seen to-day, 'e would roll over in 'is grave!

MANSON *opens the door for him. He goes.*

MARY (*gaily*). Isn't he funny? Just because his silly old father . . . .

MANSON. Ssh! His father's *dead*, Mary!

There is a sudden pause. He comes down to her.

Well, have you thought any more about . . . .

MARY. About wishing?—Yes, lots.

MANSON. And have you? . . . .

MARY. I don't know what to think. You see, I never believed properly in wishing before. Wishing is a dreadfully difficult thing, when you *really* set about it, isn't it?

MANSON. Yes.

MARY. You see, ordinary things won't do: they're all wrong, somehow. You'd feel a bit of a sneak to wish for *them*, wouldn't you?

MANSON. Yes.

MARY. Even if you got them, you wouldn't care, after all. They'd all turn to dust and ashes in your hand.
That last bit is what Grannie Durden said.

MANSON. Who's she?

MARY. She's the poor old woman I've been having breakfast with. Do you know, *she* said a funny thing about wishing. I must tell you first that she's quite blind and very deaf— Well, she's been wishing ever so long to see and hear; and at last she says she can!

MANSON. What—see and hear?

He glances toward the drawing-room.

MARY. Um! I must say, I didn't notice any difference myself; but that's what she said.

She agreed with you, that wishing was the only way; and if you didn't know how, then you had to keep on wishing to wish, until you could.

MANSON. And so . . . .

MARY. Well, that's as far as I've got.

ROGERS *re-enters.*

MANSON. Yes, what is it, Rogers?

ROGERS. Cook's compliments, Mr. Manson, and might she make so bold as to request your presence in the kitchen, seein' as she's 'ad no orders for lunch yet. O' course, she says, it will do when you've *quite* finished any private business you may 'av' in the upper part of the 'ouse!

He delivers this with distinct hauteur. MANSON, *smiling, goes up to him and takes his head in his hands.*

MANSON. Why do you dislike me so, Rogers?

ROGERS (*taken aback*). Me? Me dislike you, Mr. Manson? *Oh no!*

MANSON. Come along, little comrade.

They go out like brothers, MANSON'S *arm round the lad's shoulders.* MARY *is left seated on the table, chuckling at the situation. Suddenly her face becomes serious.*

MARY. What have I needed most? What have I not had? . . . . Oh! I know! . . . .

Her face flames with the inspiration of it.

And I never dreamed of it till now!

ROBERT *enters by the main door. The child turns round, and, seeing him, gives a startled little cry. They stand facing each other, silent. Presently* ROBERT *falters:*

ROBERT. Beg pawdon, miss: I . . . .

MARY. Who are you? What are you doing here?

ROBERT. I'm . . . . I was goin' ter see what's—what's in that room . . . .

MARY. If you do, I'll . . . .

She moves swiftly to the bell.

ROBERT. It's a mistake, miss. P'r'aps I'd—I'd better tek my 'ook.

MARY. Stop! . . . .
How dare you! Don't you know you're a very wicked man?

ROBERT. Me, miss?

MARY. Yes, you.

ROBERT. Yus, I know it.

MARY (*trying to save the sinner*). That isn't the way to be happy, you know. Thieves are never *really* happy in their hearts.

ROBERT. Wot's that? . . . . Do you tike me for a thief, miss? You? . . . .

He advances to the table; she edges away.

Why don't you arnser?

MARY. I had rather not say.

ROBERT. Cos why?

MARY. I don't want to be unkind.

ROBERT *sinks stricken into the chair behind him.*

ROBERT. Oh, my Gawd, my Gawd!

MARY (*relenting*). Of course, if—if you're sorry, that makes a difference. Being sorry makes a lot of difference. Doesn't it?

ROBERT. Yus, a fat lot!

MARY. Only you must never give way to such a wicked temptation again. Oh, don't cry!

She goes to him.

ROBERT. Oo is cryin? I'm not cryin'—not a cryin' sort! On'y—you 'adn't no right to talk to me like that, miss.

MARY. Why, didn't you own . . . .

ROBERT. No, I didn't. It was you as jumped down my throat, an' took up my words afore I got 'em out.

MARY. Oh: I'm sorry. Did I make a mistake?

ROBERT. Yus, miss—a whopper.

MARY. Then you're not a . . . .

ROBERT. *No*, swelp me Gaw— (*He pulls himself up.*) I assure you, no. I'm a bit of a low un; but I never come so stinkin' low as that.

You thought I looked like one, all the same. Didn't yer, now?

MARY. Well, you see, I thought you said so; and then there's your . . . .

ROBERT. I know! You don't like my mug. It ain't much of a mug to look at, is it? Sort of a physog for a thief, eh? See them lines?—Want to know what them stand for? That's drink, an' starvytion, an' 'ard work, an' a damned lonely life.

MARY. Oh, you poor man!

ROBERT. Yus, miss, I am.

MARY. You mustn't say "damned," you know.

ROBERT. No, miss.

MARY. *That's* wicked, at any rate.

ROBERT. Yus, miss.

MARY. And you owned yourself that you drank. That's not very good, either.

ROBERT. No, miss.

MARY. So, you see, you *are* a little bit naughty, after all, aren't you?

ROBERT. Yus, miss.

MARY. Now, isn't it much nicer for you to try and look at things in this way? I'm sure you feel a great deal better already.

Do you know— Wait a moment . . . .

She resumes her seat, turning it toward him, the passion of salvation in her eyes.

Do you know, I'd like to do you some good!

ROBERT. You, miss?

MARY. Yes, wouldn't you like me to?

ROBERT. You're the on'y person in the world I'd—I'd like to see try, miss.

MARY (*glad in the consciousness of "being used"*). That's because you know I'm interested in you, that I mean it, that I'm not trying to think only of myself.

ROBERT (*a little stupidly*). Aren't you, miss?

MARY. No: we must always remember that there are other people in the world besides ourselves.

This coincides with his experience; he says so.

ROBERT. Yus, miss, there are.

MARY. Very well: now I'll see what I can do to help you.

ROBERT. Thank you, miss.

MARY. Now, don't you think, if you were really *to wish* very hard, it would make things better for you?

ROBERT. I don't know what you mean, miss.

MARY. Well, it's like this: if you only wish very very hard, everything comes true.

ROBERT. Wot *I* want, ain't no use wishing for!

MARY. It doesn't matter what it is! Anything you like! It will all happen!

ROBERT. Blimey, wot's the good o' talkin'?

MARY. Oh, wouldn't you like to help to spin the fairy-tale?

ROBERT (*roughly*). I don't believe in no fairy-tales!

MARY. *I do!* I don't believe there's anything else in the world, if we only knew! And that's why I'm wishing! I'm wishing now! I'm wishing hard!

ROBERT (*passionately*). So am I, Gawd 'elp me! But it's no use!

MARY. It is! It is! What are you wishing for?

ROBERT. Never you mind! Summat as impossible as—fairy-tales!

MARY. So's mine! That's what it has to be! Mine's the most impossible thing in the world!

ROBERT. Not more than mine!

MARY. What's yours?

ROBERT. What's yours?

MARY. I want my father!

ROBERT. I want my little kid!

There is a second's pause.

MARY. Your—what? . . . .

ROBERT (*brokenly*). My—daughter.

MARY. Oh! . . . .

She goes towards him; they face each other.

(*Softly.*) Is she dead?

He stands looking at her.

Is she?

He turns away from her.

ROBERT. Fur as I am concerned—yus.

MARY. What do you mean? *Isn't* she dead?

ROBERT. She's alive, right enough.

MARY. Perhaps—perhaps she ran away? . . . .

ROBERT. She got took.

MARY. How do you mean—gypsies?

ROBERT. I *give* 'er up. 'Ad to.

MARY. Why?

ROBERT. Look at me! . . . .
That—an' the drink, an' the low wages, an' my ole woman dyin'! That's why I give 'er up.

MARY. Where is she now?

ROBERT. Never you mind. She's bein' looked arfter.

MARY. By whom?

ROBERT. By people as I've allus 'ated like poison!

MARY. Why, aren't they kind to her?

ROBERT. Yus: they've made 'er summat, as I couldn't 'a' done.

MARY. Then why do you hate them?

ROBERT. I don't any longer. I 'ates myself, I 'ates the world I live in, I 'ates the bloomin' muck 'ole I've landed into!

MARY. Your wife's dead, you say?

ROBERT. Yus.

MARY. What would she think about it all?

ROBERT. I don't know: I don't know: I don't know.

MARY *sits down beside him.*

MARY (*thoughtfully*). Isn't it strange—both our wishes alike! You want your little girl; and I, my father!

ROBERT. What sort of a . . . .

MARY. Yes?

ROBERT. What sort of a bloke might your father be, miss?

MARY. I don't know. I have never seen him.

ROBERT. Got no idea? Never—'eard *tell* of 'im?

MARY. Never.

ROBERT. 'Aven't thought of 'im yourself, I s'pose? Wasn't particular worth while, eh?

MARY. It's not that. I've been selfish. I never thought anything about him until to-day.

ROBERT. What made you think of 'im—to-day?

MARY. I can't quite say. At least . . . .

ROBERT. Mebbe 'e wrote—sent a telingram or summat, eh?—t' say as 'e was comin'?

MARY (*quickly*). Oh no: he never writes: we never hear from him. That's perhaps a bit selfish of him, too, isn't it?

ROBERT (*after a moment*). Looks like it, don't it?

MARY. But I don't think he can be really selfish, after all.

ROBERT (*with a ray of brightness*). Cos why?

MARY. Because he must be rather like my Uncle William and Uncle Joshua.

He looks at her curiously.

ROBERT. Like your . . . .

MARY. Yes—they're his brothers, you know. This is Uncle William's house.

ROBERT. Yes, but what do you know about . . . .

MARY. About Uncle Joshua? Well, I happen to know a good deal more than I can say. It's a secret.

ROBERT. S'pose your *Uncle William* spoke to you about *'im?*

MARY. Well, yes, Uncle William spoke about him, too.

ROBERT. But never about your father?

MARY. Oh no, never.

ROBERT. Why, miss?

MARY (*slowly*). I—don't—know.

ROBERT. P'r'aps 'e ain't—good enough—to be—to be the brother of your Uncle William—and—Uncle—Joshua —eh, miss?

MARY. Oh, I can't think that!

ROBERT. Why not, miss? Three good brothers in a family don't scarcely seem possible—not as families go—do they, miss?

MARY. You mustn't talk like that! A father must be much—much better than anybody else!

ROBERT. But s'pose, miss—s'pose 'e ain't . . . .

MARY. He is! I know it! Why, that's what I'm wishing! . . . .

ROBERT. P'r'aps it ain't altogether 'is fault, miss! . . . .

Mary. Oh, don't! Don't . . . .

Robert. Things may 'a' bin again 'im, miss! . . . .

Mary. Oh, you make me so unhappy! . . . .

Robert. P'r'aps 'e's 'ad a 'ard life—a bitter 'ard life—same as I 'av', miss . . . .

He breaks down.

Mary. Ssh! Please! Please! . . . .

I can quite understand: indeed, indeed, I can! I'm sorry—oh, so sorry for you. You are thinking of yourself and of your own little girl—the little girl who doesn't know what you have been telling me. Don't be miserable! I'm sure it will all turn out right in the end—things always do; far better than you dream! Only . . . . don't take away *my* little dream!

She turns away her face. Robert *rises heavily.*

Robert. All right, miss—I won't: swelp me Gawd, I won't. Don't cry, miss. Don't, miss! Breaks my 'eart—after all you've done for me. I ort never to 'a' bin born—mekin' you cry! Thank you kindly, miss: thank you very kindly. I'll—I'll tek my 'ook.

Mary. Oh, but I'm so sorry for *you!*

Robert. Thank you, miss.

Mary. I did so want to help you.

Robert. You 'av', miss.

Mary. Before you go, won't you tell me your name? Who are you?

Robert. I . . . . I got no name worth speakin' of, miss:

I'm—just the bloke wot's a-lookin' arter the drains. Good-bye, miss.

At the door he turns.

Sorry I used bad words, miss.

She turns to him and offers her hand. He takes it, first wiping his own on his trousers.

Mary. Good-bye.

Robert. Good-bye, miss.

He goes out. She shuts the door after him, and turns a wretched little face back into the room.

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Third Act.

THE FOURTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. After a moment, MARY *comes down to the settee and buries her face in the cushions, weeping. Shortly, the handle of the drawing-room is turned, and from within there emerges a murmur of voices, the* VICAR'S *uppermost.*

VICAR (*within*). Very well, then, after you have finished your letters! . . . .

The voices continue confusedly; MARY *rises quickly and goes into the garden.*

The VICAR *enters and goes to the mantelpiece wearily: a moment later,* AUNTIE.

BISHOP (*within*). I shall only be about twenty minutes.

AUNTIE (*entering*). All right, don't hurry, James: you have all the morning.

She closes the door upon the BISHOP'S *grunts, and comes to the middle of the room.*

VICAR. Hm! When he has finished his letters!

AUNTIE. Yes, things seem to be shaping better than we thought, William. Perhaps we have a little misjudged him.

He looks at her curiously.

To think, my dear, that the rebuilding of the church is becoming possible at last! All your hopes, all your enthusiasms, about to be realized! Now, it only remains to gain your brother Joshua's approval and help, and the scheme is complete!

VICAR. Supposing he—doesn't approve of the scheme?

AUNTIE. My dear, he must approve: he will see the advantages at once. I think James made that perfectly clear! . . . .

And then, look at the opportunities it creates for *you!* Not only the church, William, the beautiful big church of your dreams, with the great spires and flashing crosses and glorious windows; but a much larger sphere of usefulness than you ever dared to dream! Think of your work, William, of your great gifts—even James had to acknowledge them, didn't he?—Think of the influence for good you will be able to wield! Ah! And then I shall see my beloved, *himself* again— No more worry, no more feverish nights and days, none of the wretched frets and fancies that have been troubling him all this morning; but the great Scholar and Saint again, the master of men's souls, the priest in the congregation.

VICAR. Suppose you try and forget me for a moment. Do you think you can?

AUNTIE. William, that's unkind! Of course I can't.

VICAR. It might mean the salvation of my soul.

AUNTIE. Oh, William! Now you're going to begin to worry again!

VICAR. Oh no: I'm quite calm. Your brother's powers of reasoning have left me philosophical. . . . .

Tell me, are you quite sure that you have grasped the full meaning of his project?

AUNTIE. Of course! You think no one can understand a simple business dealing but men! Women are every bit as clever!

VICAR. Well, then, this project: what was it?

AUNTIE. James explained clearly enough: the affiliation of your brother's scheme with that of the society he mentioned.

VICAR. Yes—*what* society?

AUNTIE. "The Society for the Extension of Greater Usefulness among the Clergy." . . . . It was an admirable suggestion—one that ought to appeal particularly to you. Haven't you always said, yourself, that if only you had enough money to . . . .

VICAR. Did you happen to realize his explanation as to the constitution of the society?

AUNTIE. To tell the truth, I wasn't listening just then: I was thinking of you.

VICAR. The *financial* possibilities of the scheme— Did his eloquence on that point escape you?

AUNTIE. Figures always bore me, and James uses dreadfully long words.

VICAR. Did you hear nothing of *profits?*

AUNTIE. I only heard him say that you were to . . . .

VICAR. Well, didn't it strike you that throughout the entire discussion he spoke rather like a *tradesman?*

AUNTIE. My dear, you can't expect everybody to be an idealist! Remember, he's a practical man: he's a bishop.

VICAR. Didn't it strike you that there are some things in this world which are not to be bought at *any* price?

AUNTIE. My dear William, bricks and mortar require money: you can't run a society without funds!

VICAR. Yes, but what of flesh and blood? What of reputation? What of a man's name?

AUNTIE. Whatever do you mean now?

VICAR. Didn't his proposal practically amount to this: that we should turn my brother Joshua's name and reputation into a bogus Building Society, of which the funds were to be scraped together from all the naked bodies and the starving bellies of the world, whilst *we* and our thieving co-directors should collar all the swag?

AUNTIE. Now, that's exactly where I think you are so unjust! Didn't you yourself refuse, before he spoke a word, to let him put a penny of his own into the concern? I must say, you were unnecessarily rude to him about that, William!

VICAR. Yes, and didn't he jump at the suggestion!

AUNTIE. He offers to give his patronage, his influence, his time. All he asks of your brother is his bare name.

VICAR. Yes, and all he asks of me is simply my eloquence, my gift of words, my power of lying plausibly!

AUNTIE. William, he is offering you the opportunity of your life!

VICAR. Damnation take my life!

AUNTIE. William, why are you so violent?

VICAR. Because violence is the only way of coming to the truth between you and me!

AUNTIE (*now thoroughly afraid*). What do you mean by the truth, William?

VICAR. I mean this: What is the building of this church to you? Are you so mightily interested in architecture, in clerical *usefulness*, in the furtherance of God's work?

Auntie. I am interested in *your* work, William. Do you take me for an atheist?

Vicar. No: far worse—for an idolater!

Auntie. William . . . .

Vicar. What else but idolatry is this precious husband-worship you have set up in your heart—you and all the women of your kind? You barter away your own souls in the service of it: you build up your idols in the fashion of your own respectable desires: you struggle silently amongst yourselves, one against another, to push your own god foremost in the miserable little pantheon of prigs and hypocrites you have created!

Auntie (*roused*). It is for your own good we do it!

Vicar. Our own good! What have you made of me? You have plucked me down from whatever native godhead I had by gift of heaven, and hewed and hacked me into the semblance of your own idolatrous imagination! By God, it shall go on no longer! If you have made me less than a man, at least I will prove myself to be a priest!

Auntie. Do you call it a priest's work to . . . .

Vicar. It is *my* work to deliver you and me from the bondage of lies! Can't you see, woman, that God and Mammon are about us, fighting for our souls?

Auntie (*determinedly*). Listen to me, William, listen to me . . . .

Vicar. I have listened to you too long!

Auntie. You would always take my counsel before . . . .

VICAR. All that is done with! I am resolved to be a free man from this hour—free of lies, free of love if needs be, free even of you, free of everything that clogs and hinders me in the work I have to do! I will do my own deed, not yours!

AUNTIE (*with deadly quietness*). If I were not certain of one thing, I could never forgive you for those cruel words: William, this is some madness of sin that has seized you: it is the temptation of the devil!

VICAR. It is the call of God!

AUNTIE (*still calmly*). That's blasphemy, William! But I will save you—yes, I will—in spite of yourself. I am stronger than you.

They look at each other steadily for a moment, neither yielding.

VICAR. Then I accept the challenge! It is God and I against you, Martha!

AUNTIE. God and I against *you*, William.

VICAR. So now—for my work!

AUNTIE (*quietly*). Yes: what are you going to do?

VICAR. Three things.

AUNTIE. Yes—and they? . . . .

VICAR. Tell Mary everything: send for my brother, Robert: and then—answer that monster in there.

AUNTIE (*fearfully*). William, you would never dare! . . . .

VICAR. Look! . . . .

MARY *re-enters from the garden.*

Mary. Auntie! Uncle! I want to speak to you at once—both of you!

Vicar. You are just in time: I wanted to speak to *you* at once.

Mary. Is it important, uncle? Mine's dreadfully important.

Vicar. So is mine.

Auntie (*quickly*). Let the child speak, William. Perhaps . . . .

Mary. I hardly know how to begin. Perhaps it's only my cowardice. Perhaps it isn't really dreadful, after all . . . .

Auntie (*troubled*). Why, what are you thinking of, Mary?

Mary. It's about something we have never spoken of before; something I've never been told.

Vicar (*searchingly*). Yes? . . . .

Auntie (*falteringly*). Yes? . . . .

Mary. I want to know about my father.

There is a short silence.

Vicar. Now: is God with you or with me, Martha?

Mary. What do you mean by that? Is it very terrible, uncle?

He stands silent, troubled. Mary *crosses him, going to* Auntie.

Auntie . . . .

Auntie. Don't ask me, child: I have nothing to tell you about your father.

MARY. Why, isn't he . . . .

AUNTIE. I have nothing to tell you.

VICAR. I have.

AUNTIE. William! . . . .

VICAR. I have, I say! Come, sit here, Mary.

She sits to left of him, on the settee. Auntie is on the other side of him.

Now! What do you want to know about your father?

MARY (*passionately*). Everything there is to know!

AUNTIE. William, this is brutal! . . . .

VICAR. It is *my work*, Martha!—God's work! Haven't I babbled in the pulpit long enough about fatherhood and brotherhood, that I should shirk His irony when He takes me at my word!

Now: what put this thought into your head to-day?

MARY. I don't know. I've been puzzling about something all the morning; but there was nothing clear. It only came clear a few minutes ago—just before I went into the garden. But I think it must have begun quite early—before breakfast, when I was talking to my—to Manson.

AUNTIE. Manson! . . . .

MARY. And then, all of a sudden, as I was sitting there by the fireplace, *it came*—all in a flash, you understand! I found myself wishing for my father: wondering why I had never seen him: despising myself that I had never thought of him before.

VICAR. Well, what then?

MARY. I tried to picture him to myself. I imagined all that he must be. I thought of you, Uncle William, and Uncle Joshua, and of all the good and noble men I had ever seen or heard of in my life; but still—that wasn't quite like a father, was it? I thought a father must be much, much better than anything else in the world! He must be brave, he must be beautiful, he must be good! I kept on saying it over and over to myself like a little song: he must be brave, he must be beautiful, he must be good! (*Anxiously.*) That's true of fathers, isn't it, uncle? Isn't it?

VICAR. A father ought to be all these things.

MARY. And then . . . . then . . . .

VICAR. Yes? . . . .

MARY. I met a man, a poor miserable man—it still seems like a dream, the way I met him—and he said something dreadful to me, something that hurt me terribly. He seemed to think that my father—that perhaps my father—might be nothing of the sort!

AUNTIE. Why, who was he—the man?

MARY. He wouldn't tell me his name: I mistook him for a thief at first; but afterwards I felt very, very sorry for him. You see, his case was rather like my own. *He was wishing for his little girl.*

There is a short silence.

VICAR. Where did you meet with him?

MARY. Here, in this room.

AUNTIE. When was this?

MARY. A few minutes ago—just before you came in.

AUNTIE. Where is he now?

MARY. He said good-bye. He has gone away.

AUNTIE. For good?

MARY. Yes, I think so: I understood him to mean that.

VICAR. Was he—a rough-looking man?

MARY. Dreadfully; and he swore once—but afterwards he said he was sorry for that.

VICAR. Did he frighten you at all?

MARY. No, not exactly frighten: you see, I felt sorry for him.

VICAR (*slowly*). *And he wouldn't tell you his name?* . . . .

MARY. No: I asked him, but he wouldn't.

The VICAR *ponders this for a moment.*

AUNTIE. Now, is it God with you or with me, William?

For a moment this unnerves him. Then setting his teeth together, he faces his task stubbornly.

VICAR. Have you any idea about this man?

MARY. How do you mean—any idea?

VICAR. As to why he put this doubt into your head about your father.

MARY. He seemed to be thinking about himself, and how unworthy he was of his own little girl.

VICAR. Did *he* say—unworthy?

MARY. That's what I think he meant. What he said was that perhaps my father wasn't good enough to be your brother, uncle. That's not true, is it?

Vicar. No, by Heaven! *That's not true!*

Mary (*rapturously*). Oh, I knew it, I knew it!

Vicar (*in an agony*). Stop! You don't understand!

Mary. I understand quite enough! That's all I wanted to know!

Vicar. Listen, child! Listen! I mean that it is I who am not worthy to be called his brother.

Auntie. William, this is absurd!

Mary (*snuggling up to him*). Isn't he a dear?

Vicar (*freeing himself*). Listen to me, Mary: I have something awful to tell you: try and bear it bravely. You will hate me for it—never love me again! . . . . No, listen! Supposing your father were—not what you imagine him to be? . . . .

Mary. Uncle, didn't you just say . . . .

Vicar. Supposing that wretched man you spoke with just now were right, after all! What would you say?

Mary. Uncle! . . . .

Vicar. Supposing he were one upon whom all the curses of the world had been most cruelly visited—his poor body scarred and graven out of human semblance; his soul the prey of hate and bitterness; his immortal spirit tortured and twisted away from every memory of God! What would you say?

Mary. Uncle, it would be terrible—terrible!

Vicar. What will you say, then, to the man who has brought him to such ruin? What will you say to that man being God's priest? What word of loathing have you for the thief who has stolen the love of another man's child, for the murderer who has slain his brother's soul?

MARY. Uncle, do you mean . . . . do you mean . . . .

VICAR. I mean that I am the man!

MARY. You! . . . .

AUNTIE (*passionately*). It is not true! It is a lie! It's entirely your father's own fault!

MARY. I don't understand. Why should Uncle William lie to me?

AUNTIE. He is overwrought: he is ill. It is like your uncle William to take upon himself another man's wickedness!

MARY. Then, *that* is true, at least: my father is a *wicked* man! . . . .

AUNTIE. I don't want to speak about your father!

MARY. He is nothing that I have wished him to be: not *brave* . . . .

VICAR. Yes—*that* at least!

MARY (*turning towards him*). *Beautiful?* . . . .

VICAR. What do you mean by beautiful?

MARY. You know what I mean: What you once said God was, when you called *Him* beautiful.

VICAR. I have no right to judge your father.

She perceives the evasion.

MARY. Not even—*good?* . . . .

VICAR. He is what I have made him. I and no other!

She stands looking at him piteously.

AUNTIE. There is another—I! I kept them apart: I poisoned your uncle against him: I took you away from him: it was I who kept you in ignorance of your father!

MARY. Why? . . . .

AUNTIE. Because he stands in the way of my husband's happiness! Because, even, he is your father! Because I hate him! I could almost *wish him dead!*

VICAR. Martha! . . . .

There is a long pause.

MARY. Then I have nobody, now. It's no use wishing any more.

AUNTIE. Mary . . . .

MARY. No! . . . . I want to be alone.

She goes out into the garden. They follow her out with their eyes.

VICAR. So! God has revealed His partisanship!—He has beggared us both!

AUNTIE *considers this for a moment. Then, with sudden determination, she rises.*

AUNTIE. I am not going to be beggared without a struggle for it, William!

She moves briskly across to the bell.

VICAR. What are you going to do, Martha?

AUNTIE (*flashing round passionately, before she can ring the bell*). Do you think I am going to stand by and see your life wrecked—yours and that child's?

VICAR. We are not the only persons concerned, Martha.

AUNTIE. As far as I care, you are!

VICAR. And what of Robert? . . . .

AUNTIE. Robert! That's what I'm going to see to now!

She rings the bell.

There's only one way of dealing with a brute like that!

VICAR. What's that?

AUNTIE. Pack him off to Australia, Africa—anywhere, so long as we are never pestered with him again!

VICAR. Do you think you'll get him to go?

AUNTIE. Oh, I'll find the money! A drunkard like that will do anything for money! Well, he shall have plenty: perhaps he'll drink himself to . . . .

VICAR. By Heaven, but I say no!

AUNTIE. By Heaven, but I say yes! It's about time I took things in hand again! Do you think I'm going to risk that child learning everything? She knows more than enough already! Providentially, she does not know the worst!

VICAR. And what knowledge do you consider Providence has so kindly spared her?

AUNTIE. The knowledge *who that man was!* She shall never know, if I can have my way!

She rings the bell again, impatiently.

Why doesn't he come? Why doesn't he come?

VICAR. Who?

AUNTIE. Manson.

> MANSON *enters by the main door. There is a subtle change in him, a look of mastery in his eye that at first escapes her.*

MANSON. You rang.

AUNTIE. Yes, come in, Manson. I want to have a little confidential talk with you—confidential, you understand.

MANSON. If you please. I expected this.

> *He has the air of a judge. She hurries on, unheeding.*

AUNTIE. Manson, you saw everything. You were here when that dreadful creature arrived.

MANSON. Which?

AUNTIE. Why, my husband's brother, Robert. Didn't you tell me, William, that Manson heard everything he said?

VICAR. Yes.

AUNTIE. Then you will know the wretched plight we are in. Manson, it's terrible. I want your help. By-the-way, you have not spoken about it to the other servants?

MANSON. I am always most discreet.

AUNTIE (*touched*). Thank you, Manson, thank you: I felt that I could trust you. It's to prove my trust that I've sent for you now. Perhaps I'd better begin by explaining everything quite clearly, so that you . . . .

MANSON. There is no need. I know everything already.

AUNTIE. Everything! How? . . . .

Manson. A certain gift of divination—mine by birth. And, besides, you forget that I had a long conversation with your brother-in-law after master left the room.

Auntie. What! Whilst my brother was here?

Manson. Yes: we all three had breakfast together.

Auntie. Breakfast together! Then James has heard all!

Manson. Not quite all. You may have observed that your brother is a little deaf.

Auntie. But surely— What did he think?

Manson. He mistook him for your husband.

Auntie. My husband!

Manson. Your brother is also a little blind, remember.

Auntie (*delighted*). Then James never found out? . . . .

Manson. Oh yes: I took care to undeceive him on the point.

Auntie. Good gracious! How did he take it?

Manson. At first, a little angrily; but, after a while, some few poor words of my own chanced to move him to more—profitable meditation.

Auntie. Manson, you're perfectly wonderful! I respect you very, very much!

Manson. It is not enough. I shall require more.

Auntie (*embarrassed*). Oh, of course, I shall be glad to do anything that . . . .
Why, what do you mean? . . . .

Manson. I mean that service such as mine demands a greater recompense!

AUNTIE. You may be sure that anything in reason . . . .

MANSON. It must go beyond that!

AUNTIE. Well, what do you ask?

MANSON. The uttermost obedience, loyalty, and love!

AUNTIE. Manson, how dare you! By what right . . . .

MANSON. By my own right!

AUNTIE. This is insolence! What right do you mean?

MANSON. The right of understanding, the right of purpose, and the right of will!

AUNTIE. You force me to speak angrily to you! Do you forget that you are my servant?

MANSON. No! And, therefore, it is my office to command you now! Sit down, and hear me speak!

VICAR. He has been sent to help us! Martha, this is God!

MANSON. Over here, please.

He points to the settee.

AUNTIE. I . . . . I . . . .

MANSON *still points. She wavers as in a dream, and at length moves mechanically across the room, obeying him.*

MANSON. Now, let me tell you exactly why you have sent for me here. There is a strange and wretched turmoil in your soul: you have done wrong, and you know it—but you don't know all! You would keep what miserable little right you have by bolstering it up with further wrong. And you have sent for me to help you in that wrong!

AUNTIE. How dare you say that?

MANSON. Haven't you sent for me to help you in your plans about his brother, Robert?

AUNTIE (*faintly*). What plans? . . . .

MANSON. The plan of banishing him further from your lives than ever! The plan of *providing* for him! The plan of patching up his bitter wrongs with gold!

AUNTIE. How did you know that?

MANSON. I know *you!* What, do you think that God's eyes are like your brother's—blind? Or do you think these things can be done in darkness without crying aloud to Heaven for light?

AUNTIE. I am here to work my will, not yours!

MANSON. What gain do you hope to bring yourself by that?

AUNTIE. I am not thinking of myself! I am thinking only of my husband's happiness!

MANSON. Behold the happiness you have already brought him!

AUNTIE. There is the child! It would break her heart!

MANSON. What is her heart but broken now—by you?

AUNTIE. Robert himself would be the first to repudiate any other plan.

MANSON. Have you tried him?

AUNTIE. Of course not; but he must see the impossibility.

MANSON. What impossibility?

AUNTIE. The impossibility of having him here: the impossibility of letting him see the child: the impossibility of him and his brother ever meeting again!

MANSON. Is that your only difficulty?

AUNTIE. Only difficulty! What, would you have me welcome him with open arms?

MANSON. Yes, and heart, too!

AUNTIE. Have him here, entertain him, treat him as a guest?

MANSON. As an honored guest!

AUNTIE. In this house?

MANSON. This house.

AUNTIE. Good Heavens! what else?

MANSON. Sweep and garnish it throughout, seek out and cleanse its hidden corners, make it fair and ready to lodge him royally as a brother!

AUNTIE (*desperately*). I won't do it! I can't! I can't!

MANSON. With my assistance, you can!

VICAR. Manson, how can we bring it about?

AUNTIE. I daren't! I daren't!

VICAR. I dare! I will!

AUNTIE. In God's name, how is it possible?

MANSON. Make me the lord and master of this house for one little hour!

VICAR. By Heaven, yes!

MANSON. And you? You? . . . .

She falters a few moments: then, utterly broken down, she whispers, feebly:

AUNTIE. Yes.

MANSON. Then first to cleanse it of its abominations!

The BISHOP *enters from the drawing-room. He carries a letter in his hand.*

BISHOP. Well, here is the letter I have written to the secretary of our Society: I have explained everything quite nicely; and have warned him, of course, against doing anything definite in the matter until we have consulted your dear brother. Now . . . .

Eh, what? Oh! . . . .

He becomes aware of MANSON *and fixes his ear-trumpet.*

MANSON. I bear you a message from the master of this house. Leave it.

BISHOP. Really, I . . . . Most extraordinary! Hm!

He blows and wipes the trumpet carefully and fixes it again. MANSON, *meanwhile, waits, as though carven in marble.*

Now: again, please.

MANSON. You are no longer necessary. Leave this house.

BISHOP. You scoundrel! You impudent scoundrel! You . . . . You . . . . Give me back my five-pound note!

MANSON (*pointing to the fire*). It is invested for you.

BISHOP. I will have it back at once!

Manson. Hereafter, was the arrangement.

Bishop. Mr. Smythe! Where are you? Do you hear what this blackguard says?

Vicar. I endorse it, every word.

Bishop. Martha! . . . .

She turns away from him as from some horror of sin. The Bishop *stands dumfounded for a moment or two, then he boils over.*

Now I see it all! I've been trapped, I've been tricked! Martha, this is all your doing! Brought me here on a trumped-up story of relationship with the Bishop of Benares, to insult me! Oh, what would that godly man say if he heard of it!—And he *shall* hear of it, believe me! Your infamy shall be spread abroad! So this is your revenge, sir—(*he turns to the* Vicar)—your revenge for the contumely with which I have very properly treated you, sir! *Now* I understand why I was made to sit down and eat sausages with a butler—yes, sir, with a butler and a common working-man! Oh! I could die with shame! You have bereft me of all words! You . . . . You . . . . You are no scholar, sir! And your Greek is contemptible! . . . .

(*He crosses to* Auntie.) Martha! You are no sister of mine henceforward! *Anathema maranatha!*

He bounces up to the door, but turns back again for a last word with Manson.

And I have one word for you, sir! You are a scoundrel, sir—a cheat, an impostor! And if I could have my way with you, I would have you publicly whipped: I would visit you with the utmost rigor of the law: I would nail you up, sir, for an example!

MANSON. I have encountered similar hostility before, my lord—from gentlemen very like your lordship. Allow me . . . .

He opens the door, his eyes flashing.

BISHOP. Don't trouble, sir. I can get my hat and my stick and my portmanteau for myself! I can do very well without *your* assistance—thank God!

He stumps out. A moment later the front door is heard slamming noisily. AUNTIE *sinks, weeping, upon the settee. The* VICAR *goes over to comfort her.* MANSON, *with uplifted hand, makes the sign of a bishop's blessing.*

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Fourth Act.

THE FIFTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. There is heard a ring of the bell. All three turn their heads, alert.

VICAR. If it's my brother . . . .

MANSON. Which?

VICAR. I meant—the Bishop of Benares; but . . . .

AUNTIE. William . . . .

MANSON. It wants ten minutes of the time you said you expected him. Only ten minutes.

He goes out, closing the door softly.

VICAR. Ten minutes! . . . .

AUNTIE. We shall never be able to do it, William! How can we possibly undo the work of all these years in ten minutes? It wants a miracle.

VICAR. We must make the attempt, somehow.

AUNTIE. Yes—yes: how? Oh, I have been blind—blind! (*She walks across the room in agitation.*) Where has he gone, I wonder? We don't even know that—where he is!

VICAR (*making a movement*). Perhaps Manson . . . .

AUNTIE. No, no, no: it must be ourselves . . . .
Ten minutes!—And no assistance on *his* side: we can't expect it, after our treatment of him. He will hate *me* most of all: there's the chief difficulty! . . . .

VICAR. You would say *me*, if you had seen his face and heard his voice this morning!

AUNTIE. God help us, God pity us!

VICAR. Amen . . . .
Then, there's the child, too! That difficulty must be faced.

AUNTIE. Yes—no escape! We shall have to pay the whole debt, William: I see that.

VICAR. Who knows! Perhaps the child will have to pay most, when all is done.

AUNTIE. The innocent for the guilty—yes . . . . Oh, William, William, can you ever forgive me?

VICAR. There is much to forgive, both sides, Martha. My sin has been greater than yours. You have only loved unworthily in blindness: I have seen clearly and been a coward.

MARY *enters from the garden.*

Mary! . . . .

MARY. Let me speak, uncle. I have been thinking, out there in the garden—thinking very hard: I've been trying to put things together again and make them straight; but it's still very difficult. Only there's one thing—I'm sorry I was unkind just now: I didn't mean it: you are everything I have—everything I have ever had; and as for what uncle said—about himself, I mean—I can't believe it. No, I'm sure there's a mistake somewhere; and mistakes can always be put right, if we only help one another and mean it. Shall we try, uncle? Shall we, auntie?

AUNTIE. If it's not too late! . . . .

Mary. It can't be too late, auntie dear, if we all wish very hard. I was a coward to give up wishing. That was *my* sin, too!

Auntie. God knows, I wish, Mary! . . . .

Vicar. And I! . . . .

Mary. And, indeed, I do! . . . .
Now, I've been thinking: I've been trying to look the worst in the face. Supposing my father *is* the wicked man you say—the very, very wickedest man that ever lived, don't you think if we tried to love him very much it might make a difference?

Vicar. What made you think of that, Mary? . . . .

Mary (*simply*). It's what you taught me, uncle, in your sermons.

Vicar. *I* taught you? . . . .

Mary. Yes: and, besides, there's another reason . . . . I've been thinking of the poor man I met this morning.

Auntie. } (*together*) { Yes . . . .
Vicar. } { What of him? . . . .

Mary. *He* said he was a wicked man, and at first he looked so dreadfully wicked, I believed him; but when I began to look at him closely, and heard him talk about his little girl, everything seemed different! I could no more believe him than I can believe you, uncle, when you say such awful things about yourself! I believe he was a much better man than he ever dreamed! And so I think we might find my father just the same, if he was properly loved and looked after!

Vicar (*with determination*). Then listen to me, Mary: I have something to tell you: that very man you spoke to . . . .

Rogers *enters, his face betraying signs of his morning's affliction.*

Rogers. Beg your pardon, sir; but . . . .

Vicar. Yes, Rogers: what is it?

Rogers. Mr. Manson sent me, sir; it ain't my fault! . . . .

Vicar. Do explain yourself, Rogers!

Rogers. Well, sir, it's a bit orkard: it's . . . . I really don't know what you'll say, sir, I don't really . . . .

Vicar (*impatiently*). Come, come, come, what is it?

Rogers. *It's a man, sir!*

Vicar. Well, there's nothing very extraordinary in that. Wants to see me, eh?

Rogers. Yes, sir; and what's more, Mr. Manson told me to *bring 'im in!*

Vicar. Well, why don't you?

Rogers. 'E's mucked up to the eyes, sir! Bin down the drains! *It's the same chap as come an' made so free 'ere this mornin'!*

There is a general rapturous excitement.

Vicar. Praise God! Show him in at once!

Rogers (*flabbergasted*). What! In *'ere*, sir? . . . .

Vicar. Come, come, come!

Rogers' *cosmos is fast slipping away; he crawls abjectly to the door; his hand on the knob, he turns once more a face of bewildered inquiry upon the* Vicar, *who snaps his fingers impatiently.*

ROGERS (*with a sickly smile*). 'E's just outside, sir.

Opening the door, he whines:

Oh, *do* come in.

ROBERT *enters, amply fulfilling the lad's description. The latter lags out, nauseated with the world.*

ROBERT *stands in the middle;* AUNTIE *and* VICAR, *below him, one on either side;* MARY *with her aunt.*

ROBERT. Can I be 'eard civil in this 'ouse, if I speak a few words?

They make a movement toward him.

'Old back! Don't you come near me! Don't you so much as speak till I've done! . . . .

(*To* AUNTIE *and* VICAR, *respectively.*) You don't know me: *you* don't know me . . . . Understand?
There's no one 'ere as knows oo I am, excep' one little gel—'*er* over there. Now, keep quiet! 'Ere! . . . .

MARY *goes up to him.*

Tell 'em oo I am.

MARY. Why, it's my friend—the man I was telling you about! The man who looks after the drains!

ROBERT. That's about it: I'm the drain-man, *see?* Thought you might be mistakin' me for—summat else, if you wasn't told. Now you know.

The VICAR *lifts a hand of warning to* AUNTIE *and says to* ROBERT:

VICAR. Go on.

Robert. That's what I come 'ere to talk abaht—my job. P'r'aps you'll think as it ain't a tasty subjic, before a lot o' nice, clean, respectable people as never 'ad anythin' worse on their fingers than a bit of lawn-dirt, playin' crokey; but *some one* 'as to see to the drains, *some one* 'as to clear up the muck of the world! I'm the one.

An' I'm 'ere to tell you about it.

Auntie (*involuntarily*). Oh! . . . .

Robert. You don't like that, ma'am? 'Urts your feelin's, eh?

Auntie. Yes; but not in the way you mean.

Mary. But you know, you really are a little unpleasant!

Robert. I'm not 'ere to be pleasant, young leddy: I'm 'ere to edicate you.

Vicar. Yes, I think I see!

Auntie (*breathlessly*). Go on: go on!

Robert. Well, I come to this 'ouse this mornin', I don't mind ownin' it, in a rotten bad frame of mind: I 'ad a little job on 'and—a job a bit above my 'ead, an' it got me dahn an' worried me: yus it did—worried me. That young leddy 'll tell you wot I was like when *she* fust saw me: I looked that bad, she thought I come to steal summat! Well, p'r'aps I did, arter all—summat as I 'ad no right to, summat as don't properly belong to a streaky swine like me. That was when *she* fust saw me; but I was wuss before that, I tell you strite!

Mary (*self-consciously*). What changed you?

Robert. A bloke I met, miss, as knowed me better than I knowed myself. 'E changed me.

Auntie.	(*together*)	Manson! . . . .
Vicar.		Manson! . . . .
Mary.		Oh, I thought, perhaps . . . .

Robert. Don't know 'is name; 'e was a fair knock-aht—Got togs on 'im like an Earl's Court Exhibition . . . . '*E* changed me: 'e taught me my own mind; 'e brought me back to my own job—*drains*.

Auntie. Yes . . . .

Robert. Funny thing, ma'am, people's born different: some's born without noses in their 'eads, worth speakin' of. I wasn't—I can smell out a stink anywhere.

Auntie (*fascinated*). I am sure you can. This is most interesting!

Robert (*warming*). Moment I stuck my 'ead in this 'ouse, I knowed as summat was wrong in my line, and I ses to myself: "Wot oh, 'e ain't such an awlmighty liar, arter all—that's drains!" An' drains it was, strike me dead—arskin' your pawdon!

Mary. Now, didn't I always say . . . .

Robert. Yus, miss, you're one o' the nosey uns, I can see! Well, soon as ole Togs got done with 'is talk, I got my smeller dahn, follered up the scent, an' afore I knowed where I was, I was in it, up to my eyes!—Out there in the room with the blood-red 'eap o' books! Blimey, you never did see! Muck, ma'am!—Just look at my 'ands! Ain't that pretty?

'Owever, I got there, right enough, I don't fink! Fancy I put that little bit strite afore I done!

Auntie. Oh, this is too beautiful of you! . . . .

Robert (*burning with enthusiasm, and manifestly affected by her appreciation*). Wait a bit: I got more yet! Talk abaht bee-utiful!—That bit was on'y an ash-pan! Look 'ere, ma'am, I got the loveliest little job on as ever yer soiled yer 'ands in! . . . .

Mary. Oh, do tell us! . . . .

Auntie. } (*together*) { Yes, do! . . . .
Vicar. } { Yes, yes! . . . .

A splendid rapture infects them all.

Robert. I followed up that drain—*I* wasn't goin' to stick till kingdom come inside your little mouse-'ole out there: No, I said, "Where's this leadin' to? What's the 'ell-an'-glory use o' flushin' out this blarsted bit of a sink, with devil-knows-wot stinkin' cess-pool at the end of it!" That's wot I said, ma'am! . . . .

Auntie. Very rightly! I see! I see! . . . .

Robert. So up I go through the sludge, puffin' an' blowin' like a bally ole cart-'orse—strooth, it seemed miles! Talk abaht bee-utiful, ma'am, it ud 'a' done your 'eart good, it would really! *Rats!*—'Undreds on em, ma'am: I'm bitten clean through in places! 'Owever, I pushed my way through, some-'ow, 'oldin' my nose an fightin' for my breath, till at last I got to the end—*and then I soon saw wot was the matter!* . . . .

It's under the church—that's where it is! I know it's the church, cos I 'eard "The Church's One Foundation" on the orgin, rumblin' up over my 'ead! Well, I . . . .

All. Yes . . . . yes . . . .

Auntie. Why don't you go on? . . . .

Robert. You'd never guess wot I saw there, not if you was to try from now till glory 'allelooyer! . . . .
The biggest back-'ander, I ever did 'av', swelp me! . . . .

They hang on his words expectantly.

It ain't no drain at all!

All (*breathlessly*). Why, what is it, then? . . . .

Robert. It's a grive!

All. A grave! . . . .

Robert. Yus, one o' them whoppin' great beer-vaults as you shove big bugses' corpses inter! What d'yer think o' that now?

Mary.	(*together*)	Oh! . . . .
Auntie.		Horrible! . . . .
Vicar.		I seem to remember some tradition . . . .

Robert. You'd 'a' said so if you'd seen wot I seen! Talk abaht corfins an' shrouds an' bones an' dead men gone to rot, they wasn't in it, wot I saw dahn there! Madame Twosoes is a flea-bite to it! Lord!—I never thought there could be such a lot o' muck an' dead things all in one place before! It was a fair treat, it was, I tek my oath! . . . .
(*Rapturously.*) Why—why, it may cost a man 'is life to deal with that little job!

Vicar. My God! The thing's impossible!

Robert. Impossible! Means a bit of work, that's all!

Vicar. Why, no one would ever dare . . . .

Robert. Dare! Why, wot d'you think I come 'ere for?

Vicar. *You!* . . . .

Robert. Yus—makin' myself unpleasant . . . .

VICAR. Do you mean . . . . Do I understand . . . .

ROBERT. I mean as I've found *my place*, or I don't know a good thing when I see it!

AUNTIE. What! To go into that dreadful vault, and . . . .

ROBERT. Why not: ain't it my job?

AUNTIE. But you said—perhaps—*death* . . . .

ROBERT. It's worth it, it's a lovely bit of work!

VICAR. No, ten thousand times, no! The sacrifice is too much!

ROBERT. You call that sacrifice?—It's fun: not 'arf!

VICAR. I had rather see the church itself . . . .

ROBERT. What, you call yourself a clergyman!

VICAR. I call myself nothing: I *am* nothing—less than nothing in all this living world!

ROBERT. By God, but I call myself summat—I'm the drain-man, that's wot I am!

VICAR (*feverishly*). You shall not go! . . . .

ROBERT. Why, wot is there to fear? Ain't it worth while, to move away that load o' muck!

VICAR. The stench—the horror—the darkness . . . .

ROBERT. What's it matter, if the comrides up above 'av' light an' joy an' a breath of 'olesome air to sing by? . . . .

VICAR. Hour by hour—dying—alone . . . .

ROBERT. The comrides up in the spans an arches, joinin' 'ands . . . .

Vicar. Fainter and fainter, below there, and at last—an endless silence! . . . .

Robert. 'Igh in the dome, the 'ammerin's of the comrides as 'av' climbed aloft!

Auntie. William, there is yet one other way! . . . .

Vicar. Yes, yes, I see: I see! . . . . (*To* Robert.) Then—you mean to go?

Robert. By 'Eaven, yus!

Vicar. Then, by God and all the powers of grace, you shall not go alone! Off with these lies and make-believes! Off with these prisoner's shackles! They cramp, they stifle me! Freedom! Freedom! This is no priest's work—it calls for a man! . . . .

He tears off his parson's coat and collar, casting them furiously aside. He rolls up his sleeves.

Now, if you're ready, comrade: you and I together!

Auntie. God's might go with you, William! Accept him, Christ!

There is a silence. Then Robert *speaks with slow consideration.*

Robert. I—don't—know. It's dangerous, you understand!

Vicar. I go with you.

Robert. This ain't psalms an 'ymns an' ole maids' tea-parties, mind you! It may mean typhoid!

Vicar. I understand.

Robert. Rats.

VICAR. Yes.

ROBERT. They don't leave you alone: they got teeth, remember—poison in 'em!

VICAR. I will go with you.

A slight pause. Then ROBERT, *dropping into a quite ordinary tone, says:*

ROBERT. Then let's 'av' summat to eat, an' get along. There's nuthin' more to say.

MARY (*inspired*). Yes, there is!

ROBERT. What do you mean, miss?

MARY. I mean that I understand: that I know who you are.

ROBERT. Me? . . . .

MARY (*simply*). Yes, you are my father.

ROBERT. 'Ow the everlastin' did you know that?

MARY (*going up to him*). Because you are my wish come true: because you are brave, because you are very beautiful, because you are good!

ROBERT. My little kid! My little kid!

He holds her to his heart.

VICAR. (*Taking his left hand.*) Robert!

AUNTIE. (*Taking his other hand.*) Brother!

They form a kind of cross. MANSON *and* ROGERS *re-enter to set the table for lunch.*

MANSON. Come along, Rogers. Take that end.

They lay the cloth, as it were with ceremonial gravity, MANSON *being at the upper end of the table. They pay no heed to the others, who watch them as in a dream.*

ROBERT. I could just do with a good, square feed. My work meks me 'ungry.

MANSON. Flowers, Rogers.

His every act is like a benediction. Presently he speaks:

Beg pardon, sir: perhaps you'd like to know —the Bishop of Benares is here.

VICAR. What, already! Let's have him in at once!

MANSON *deliberates with the flowers before he speaks.*

MANSON. He is here.

The VICAR *crosses toward him.*

VICAR. What do you mean? Where is he?

MANSON *looks at him over the flowers.*

MANSON. Here.

The VICAR *steps back, gazing at him. After a moment he gasps:*

VICAR. In God's name, who are you?

MANSON. In God's Name—your brother.

He holds out his hand. The VICAR *takes it, sinking to his knees and sobbing as one broken yet healed.*

The curtain falls. It is the end of the play.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

A PLAY OF THE PRESENT DAY SETTING FORTH IN SIGNIFICANT FORM BY THE AID OF SEVEN PLAYERS THE STORY OF A MORNING IN RIPENING SUMMER

Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the fire of coals, and bringeth forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.—Isa. 54:16

The Idol-Breaker, written off and on between the years 1908–13, was first published in book form by Harper and Brothers, New York, in January, 1914. Negotiations for its production were in process when the World War came. Outside amateur circles, it is still awaiting production on the regular stage.

THE IDOL-BREAKER

The Idol-Breaker is a play of the Present Day, setting forth in Significant Form, by the aid of Seven Players, the Story of a Morning in Ripening Summer.

The Time is from four to half-past six in the morning, Little Boswell reckoning. In order that the Audience may realize this fact, a chime of bells, representing the Sunday School clock, clangs discordantly every quarter of an hour directly over their heads.

The Place is the Interior of the Smithy of Little Boswell, a building of rough-hewn stones and huge oak timbers. In the left wall is a door, heavily chained and padlocked, leading to the inner workshop. At the back may be seen a long low window, a Dutch door caverned with shadows before daybreak, and a forge. Outside runs the high road, with a sweep of purple moors beyond. There is a small open window in the right wall; and the proscenium is regarded as an imaginary window, looking out upon Little Boswell.

Seating accommodation includes the anvil in the middle of the floor; left thereof, an overturned yellow box labeled "Empire Mustard," and a wheelbarrow, laden at one end with bricks; a carpenter's horse by the open window; a nail-keg with protruding spikes above the mustard-box; and a plowshare among the débris below the long low window.

The Persons represented are Adam, a blacksmith; Naomi, a woman of the highroad; Ellen, a woman of Little Boswell; Nathaniel Dank, a lawyer; Samuel Snark, a man of letters; Jeremiah Jones, an ironmonger; and Jake, a wastrel. The Audience also take part in the play. The auditorium being fictioned as Little Boswell, it follows that they are Little Boswellites. Unless . . . . But that anticipates.

THE FIRST ACT

The curtain rises upon darkness as the big Sunday School clock overhead drones four. This is followed by a long silence. Out of it then comes the shrill high cry of a cock crowing. It sounds like a triumphant jeer. A glimmering dawn creeps in, quickening imperceptibly. The smithy appears as in a vapor.

A man passes the long window. For a moment, his great bulk blots out the dawn. There is heard a fumbling at the door, and the man comes lumbering in. Hatless, coatless. It is ADAM.

Plucking his leathern apron from its peg, he drags it on. Rolls up his sleeves. Shuts to and bolts the lower half of the door. Then tries the bellows of the forge: the banked embers give back a sullen glow. He moves to the anvil and paws gloomily the sledge hammer. Lifts it, deep in thought. Then brings it clamoring down upon the anvil. It is like a shout in iron.

ADAM. God! I'd like to break something.

A woman stands in the deep shadows of the Dutch doorway, watching him. Her face is dimly visible. It is NAOMI.

ADAM *kicks the sledge aside, sits on the anvil and lights his pipe.*

It's the place, that's what it is. Places like this breed slaves. That's why we blather so much about our freedom.

NAOMI. Talking to yourself? I thought it was on'y play-folk as did a thing like that.

He turns, startled at the voice.

What's the matter with you, master? Got some maggot in your head?

ADAM. Where the plague did you drop from?

NAOMI. Me? Oh, from out of the clouds.

ADAM. I think you did. I never set eyes on you before.

NAOMI. Didn't you? I set eyes on you though.

ADAM. I don't remember. When?

NAOMI. Last night. Up on the moor yonder.
We were kind of bedfellows, you and me, last night: on'y you didn't know it.

He takes this in before speaking.

ADAM. Last night! Why, last night, I was . . . .

NAOMI. Yes, I seen you. I was on the other side of the hedge.

ADAM. What were you doing, out after midnight?

NAOMI. Watching you.

ADAM. I heard something, too. I took it for some wild thing stirring in the dark.

NAOMI. It was me, watching.

ADAM (*uneasily*). How do you mean—watching?

NAOMI. Don't you know as all wild things watch men? They been at it a long time—since the beginning of the world. I tell you, they get to learn a lot about men, afore they done.

ADAM. Other side of the hedge, eh? Why didn't you speak?

NAOMI. I did. All night long.

ADAM. I never heard a word.

NAOMI. There wasn't a word.

Her eyes shine out from the shadows.

ADAM. If you want to know anything, I wasn't properly myself, last night. I was drunk, that's what I was. Yes, I was: dead drunk!

NAOMI. Well, I known that kind too, in my life.

ADAM. It's the only way to be free.

NAOMI. Ay, a many of them said so, one time and another, the way I come.

ADAM. What way might that be?

NAOMI. I come a goodish way to get here. I don't know as I could find it again myself! . . . . Not even if I wanted. It would take a bloodhound to follow me, the way I come.

ADAM. Humph! Expecting one?

NAOMI. Not this journey.

He is drawn a little nearer to her.

ADAM. You're a gipsy woman.

NAOMI. Am I?

ADAM. Yes, I've seen your sort before. There's lots on 'em tramp up and down this way on the highroad.

NAOMI. My sort, were they? What's—your sort? . . . . Or are bastards a kind of no sort, like me?

He is taken aback for a moment.

Adam. Well, and if I am one! You had nothing to do with my birth.

Naomi. You don't know that. The stars have something to say about that, maybe.

Adam. One of them fortune tellers, eh? . . . . Funny, you should mention stars, too. I was thinking of stars all night long. Them and the morning dew between them sobered me up.

Here! How did you tell I were a bastard?

Naomi. I seen it, like it were wrote.

Adam. Where did you learn to see a thing like that?

Naomi. On the other side of the hedge.

He is drawn nearer still.

Adam. There's one thing plain to me. Your sort never come out of Little Boswell.

Naomi. Maybe I missed something. What is it?

Adam. Look around you, far as you can see. That's Little Boswell! All them dummy-heads sleeping out there —man, woman and child. They're Little Boswell! My God, you'd know it right enough, if you belonged.

Naomi. But you don't belong. Bastards don't belong. Don't that seem to lift you up a bit?

Adam. Ay sometimes, inside of me, here. But Lord bless you, they don't understand pride.

Come inside, woman. I'll tell you something.

He makes to undo the bolt. She is watching him steadily.

Naomi. Do you want me?

ADAM. Why yes, didn't you hear me ask you to . . . .

And their eyes meet.

Yes, I want you.

The door is open. She moves softly to the anvil and sits. Her garments flush through the gray dawn like flame.

ADAM *seats himself on the mustard-box.*

NAOMI. Now, master. What's *your* misery?

ADAM. I'll tell you. Look through yon window.

He means the imaginary one in front.

See them little brown heaps, up and down the hillside? Them's lead mines. Been worked ever since the Romans were here. It was Romans first set Little Boswell going; and they begun by riddling yon hill with mines.

Maybe, you think lead mines mean nothing but holes in the earth with lumps of lead at the bottom of them. They mean more than that. Something alive. Crawling on the belly in the dark, like blindworms. When the Romans were here, they meant—Slaves! Hundreds of years ago, that was; but the blood of them slaves has been running down into these valleys ever since. Some of it's bubbling up inside me now.

Slave's blood!—That's my misery. We can't get clean of it. Oh, you wouldn't think it, not to hear us talk. You'd think we were God's own people in the Promised Land. See that thing flapping up yonder on the hilltop? That's our flag. Want to know what that stands for?—Freedom!

It is not visible; but it is a little like every flag on earth.

NAOMI. Ay, it looks fine, blowing there on the wind.

ADAM. Ay—on the wind!
That's where I'm different to them. Dead words don't mean nothing to me. It's the bastard in me, I suppose. That and the work I got to do.

NAOMI. Ay, what work is that, master?

ADAM. I'm like God. I make things.

She searches him calmly like a child.

NAOMI. I felt there was something about you, moment I set eyes on you.

ADAM. Don't you see, woman? I'm a blacksmith.

NAOMI. Ay, you talk like a blacksmith.

ADAM. I talk the sort I am. There's more sorts of blacksmith in the world than them as tinkers with bits of iron. There's the sort as blows fire out of their own souls. I'm one of them. Before ironmongers were, I was: I make living children. Why woman, I tell you—you won't believe me; but I've made plows in my time!

There is a light in his eye.

NAOMI. What, them great hungry dragons as gnaw deep into the flesh of the earth?

There is a light in hers.

ADAM. Yes, the worms and the moles as burrow under the sod, they know something about me. Listen! I'll tell you something as 'll open your eyes! . . . .

An apocalyptic ecstasy uplifts him;

I make tools! Tools for the lead mines, tools for the quarries yonder, drilling tools, tools for boring. They can't dig their gardens without me. They come to me for their water pipes. I've built windmills! Why, I'm all over the place, and they pass by and don't notice it.

NAOMI. Go on, master. I like to watch iron forging.

ADAM. It's inspiration, that's what it is. Like thoughts coming alive. Only they don't believe in inspiration nowadays.

NAOMI. Ay, you'm drunk or mad or got a devil, if you dare to show them what's inside you. All the same, sometimes, when the blood roars in the heart . . . .

ADAM. That's it! Then you get up and begin to tell them things. Like I done them dummyheads, six year ago. Like I done many times. Like I done—only last night.

She glances across, interrogatively.

Ay, down in the big Sunday School, that was. Before you and me . . . .

His hand passes vaguely over his brow.

. . . . Up on the moor yonder.

NAOMI. Sunday School, eh?

ADAM. It's the only place of any size they've got. Properly speaking, that's what Little Boswell is. Just a big Sunday School of candy-puking kids.

NAOMI. I shouldn't a-took you for Sunday School, exactly. Not last night.

ADAM. Me! . . . . They'd soon let you know what I am! After last night! I'm the blasphemous swine as don't believe in nothing! That's why God sometimes puts it inside me, to get up and tell them as do, as they don't.

Maybe, though, you didn't hear nothing of our little love-feast, down yonder?

NAOMI. I did hear something. Kind of a bellowing, wasn't it?

ADAM. That was me, making myself popular.

You never saw such a picnic. Flags and high-cockalorums all over the Sunday School. Oh, it was religious, right enough. Plenty of scripture mottoes! And drums and hymns and prayers and ginger-pop, all going off together.

NAOMI. Why, what was doing, down there?

ADAM. Grand High Jubilee of the Constituted Sons of Freedom!

It's the biggest bean-feast Little Boswell ever dreamed of. God Almighty might come down from heaven and start the Day of Judgment, and they wouldn't notice it, alongside their jubilee. They've been hullabalooing over it since the Tower of Babel. So I thought it was about time I come, and put a simple question to them: just one question. I asked: Where did bastards come in? Took me exactly forty-five minutes by their groggy old clock.

NAOMI. How did they answer you?

ADAM. Like Sons of Freedom. They chucked me out.

NAOMI. How did you get even with them, after that?

ADAM. Hollared a few bad words through the vestry window; and went and liquored myself up to the neck. To spite them.

That's how you come to find me on the moor.

The memory of it holds them a moment.

NAOMI. It was a hard bed up yonder in the bracken.

ADAM. I got no sleep out of it. I lay thinking. Something sort of—come to me, last night.

NAOMI. It was a clear night. There wasn't a cloud in the sky.

ADAM (*rapt*). Like so many eyes looking into me, that's what they were! . . . .
There's one thing I can't make out. What brought you up yonder?—watching, as you call it.

NAOMI. The stars. And you wanted me.

The Sunday School clock drones the quarter as he turns toward her.

ADAM. I—wanted—you? Why, until this morning, I never so much as dreamed such a woman as you . . . .

NAOMI. There's a lot of dreaming goes on inside the heart, as you never know on, till the hour strikes.

ADAM. But I don't know anything about you. Don't even know your name, where you come from, what you are . . . . What are you?

NAOMI. Do you want to know? I am a queen.
You wouldn't think it, not to look at me, would you?

He looks at her long and earnestly. Then suddenly, drawing closer:

ADAM. Yes, I would! . . . .

But he draws back before her eyes.

I always heard as they had kings and such-like over them.

NAOMI. Who?

ADAM. The gipsy folk.

She smiles inscrutably.

How did you come by it?

NAOMI. By blood, from my folk. We been a great people in our day: Egyptian, Chinee, Phœnician.

ADAM. Phœnician! That's rum, too. My mother's kin come from Phœnicians. That was the name of them dead men out yonder. Them lead miners.

NAOMI. Maybe. We went one way and another, all over the world.

ADAM. Slaves, they were. Gutted out yon hill for the Romans.

NAOMI. Ours were kings. Builded cities—for their own treasure.

ADAM. Cities! I never heard as your sort hailed from cities.

NAOMI. We don't no longer. We belong nowhere. We just wander about from place to place like blown dust.

All the same, we had one of our own, once.

ADAM. What kind might that be?

NAOMI. The kind men builded, when they first begun to dream them. To store wealth in. That was long ago.

It had walls of marble, our city, and seven big gates of gold. Shining! Up on a hill, it was. So it might be seen. It wasn't ashamed of itself. There was nothing to hide in our city.

The men-folk, they were kings, and knew it: they made things with their own hands. The women, they were queens: they brought forth living children. And there was bread enough for all to eat. They say, gods come by way of our blood: gods with flesh to them, as walked on the earth, like men.

Then bad luck begun inside us, and we died. That's why we wandered. We been wandering ever since.

Adam. How did you come to die?

Naomi. We made a mistake—a mistake about a word.

Adam. What was it?

Naomi. Freedom.

Adam. What do you mean by freedom?

Naomi. Don't ask me. My meaning changes with the stars.

Adam. What do you mean *now? Today?*

Naomi. What *you* mean.

Adam. What do I mean?

Naomi. Something wild like me.

Adam. You! Are you—free?

Naomi. Like the wind.

Adam. Why, woman, you are what I've been looking for, all my life.

They have both risen. They stand facing each other.

Naomi. Well, I'm here. What are you going to do with me?

Adam. What are you going to do with *me?*

NAOMI. I don't know. That's one of the things I can't see. Perhaps destroy you.

ADAM. Woman!

NAOMI. Don't you come near me. There's danger in me, if you don't take me the right way. Queens can't be played with, same as common folk. Not my sort.

ADAM. Well, I'm ready. I'm not afraid.

NAOMI. You don't understand. This isn't talking.

ADAM. There's one thing I understand. It begun the moment you set foot inside this forge. Ay, and before that! —Last night, out yonder, under the stars. We belong, you and me! I see it plain, like dawn coming up out of the night: we belong!

NAOMI. Take care! You'm not the first man I heard say a word like that.

ADAM. Well, I'm the last; and I'll stand by it.

NAOMI. Keep off! . . . .

ADAM. Why, what would happen? . . . .

He stands hesitating before her.

NAOMI. There's something at the back of me you know nothing about. Oh, it's dead, it's done for, sure enough; and yet . . . .
There's nothing living as can follow you so close as that!

ADAM. Name it for me. And I'll grapple with it.

NAOMI. I can't quite spell it out. There's fangs to it. And a baying along the twisted ways of the moors! . . . .

He shakes himself free of her eyes.

ADAM. What's dead and done for don't move me. No, nor anything to come, neither. It's now! That's all I care about.

NAOMI. Ay, that's what they all said.

ADAM. There's none of Little Boswell about you. No slave's blood! You are not all tied up and strangled like a trapped wolf.

NAOMI. That's true. No ties, no bonds, the way I go!

ADAM. Out on the highroad yonder, that's your way. Up hill, down dale, any path you will! . . . .

NAOMI. Homeless! . . . .

ADAM. Masterless! . . . .

NAOMI. Naked! . . . .

ADAM. Free! . . . .

NAOMI. Alone! . . . .

ADAM. Like a wild thing! Like a young bird! Why, woman, I've been waiting for this moment. Waiting for you. Now I know the way I got to go.

NAOMI. What way?

ADAM. Yonder. On the highroad. With you.

She gazes deep into his soul before replying.

NAOMI. Well, you'm on that journey already. But there's something you forgotten.

ADAM. Forgotten . . . . What?

NAOMI. The price.

ADAM. Price what for?

NAOMI. For me.

My sort set big store by themselves. Queens don't give themselves for nothing. Not to slaves.

ADAM. What . . . . What are you asking of me?

NAOMI. My sort don't ask. I watch; and when the hour strikes . . . . God help the thing as bars my way, when I come to claim what's owing me! That is, if you don't take me right.

What, back to Little Boswell again, so soon?

ADAM (*fiercely*). Tell me what it is you want! I'll pay it, yes, I will, whatever it is. My God, for you, woman, I'd give up everything I got.

NAOMI. That's what it will cost.

ADAM. Everything! Did you say everything? . . . . Why then, I'll show you what I'm flinging away for you!

He makes a movement toward the inner workshop; but turns halfway;

When I spoke to you just now about them tools I made, and all them plows and other wonders, I didn't tell you everything: I kept something back. Oh, I'm a slave, that's true; but I'm a bastard—God's bastard, as holds Little Boswell together: the slave as makes things, do you understand? Well, perhaps I can break them, too! Without me, they shiver into pieces! . . . .

Now mark what I'm saying . . . .

His voice sinks to an awed whisper;

I've made something alive. It can speak. It's the most terrible thing on earth: it tells the truth. Comes from God: *I* made it.

He beckons her across mysteriously;

It's in there. Listen. D'you hear anything?

She lays her head to the workshop door, lifting her hand for silence.

NAOMI. Something muffled. Very soft. Like a little heart beating.

ADAM. I put it together, out of my own life.

He turns a scared look upon her;

Tell me, woman, have you ever borne a child?

Her eyes widen with unspoken thought.

NAOMI. I know what you mean.

ADAM (*passionately*). Every pang, every agony, I have known it! There isn't the woman living as can learn me anything about it. My child, do you understand? None of your Little Boswell well-begots; but mine! The bastard's! My child!

NAOMI. I see! I understand!

ADAM. The blood of my heart, it was, as woke it from dead iron. It's not born yet. Never cried! No tongue, no voice! Well now, if I leave all this behind me . . . .

NAOMI. Turn back! There's death that way!

ADAM. It's your price! Take it! It's everything I got!

NAOMI. They perished, everyone of them, that road! Turn back again!

ADAM. I'm on the way already. It's too late. The stars have spoken.

NAOMI. Not so, by all the flames and burning blood-moons of the skies!

ADAM. Bedfellows!—You yourself first spoke it! That means as we belong. You, the gipsy woman from God knows what wild places of the world, and me, the Little Boswell bastard! . . . . You've had your payment. Now, what have you got for me?

She snatches up a butcher's knife near by as he rushes madly toward her.

NAOMI. Stand back, or I'll knife you! . . . .
The man as mates with me hereafter must bring me living children. I'll have no more dead things born of my flesh.

ADAM. What, afraid? You—a wild thing!

NAOMI. Ay: it's the wildness makes afraid. Hark!

She is standing by the open window.

ADAM. What now? What are you listening for?

NAOMI. Something down the way I come. I thought . . . . Like the noise of a hound snuffing! . . . .

She draws back, sinking upon the handle of the bellows. The quickening coals illumine her, and die again.

A woman appears in the big doorway. She has a shawl over her head. It is ELLEN.

ELLEN. Thank God! I've been that worrited about you! Where ha' you been all night?

She comes to him with a harassed look. He takes her to him, as in a daze.

ADAM. I had forgotten you. You're Little Boswell, too!

Didn't they tell you nothing, down there? About me, last night?

ELLEN. I never seen a soul since you banged out of the house.

ADAM. Didn't you go to the jubilee?

ELLEN. I hadn't the heart, and you spoiling a good supper with your queer ways. Just because a few bells begun ringing!

He growls ominously.

(*Whimpering.*) I didn't see nothing. Not so much as a bun. Where you been?

ADAM. Sprawling drunk. Top of yon moor. Under the stars.

ELLEN. Yes, God knows what might come to you, in them blear mists, alone!

NAOMI (*rising*). Alone! . . . .

ELLEN *turns and sees her by the forge.*

ELLEN. Who is the woman? What is she doing here?

NAOMI. What are you doing here? Who are you, woman?

ELLEN (*bridling*). Me? I am his wife.

They stand looking at each other in the white dawn: NAOMI, *a kindling beacon, and* ELLEN *in gingham.*

The Sunday School clock drones the half-hour. If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the First Act.

THE SECOND ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. The sun has not yet risen over the hills. Ellen *stands by the anvil;* Adam *by the wheelbarrow; and* Naomi *by the carpenter's horse. They are silent for a moment, the women face to face.*

Naomi. If I was to tell you who I am, you wouldn't be any wiser. I'm not Little Boswell. I'm something you never had no dealings with in your life.

Ellen. I've known gipsy women before now. They're common enough. I've watched their carryings on many a time from my parlor window.

Naomi. You'll be watching a long while from that window, afore you know me.

Ellen. I'm not so sure as I want to know you.

Naomi. All the same, I'm here. In the same world with you. You can't blot me out by shutting your eyes.

Ellen. I don't know what you mean.

Naomi. That's what you got to watch for: what I mean.

Ellen. I didn't come here to mag with you. I come to look for my man.

Naomi. Maybe you'll find him. He's not far off yet.

Ellen. Well, you may get some on 'em to take your meaning: *I* can't follow a single word you say.

Naomi. Ay: you'm Little Boswell.

She moves into the Dutch doorway, a glowing shadow, looking up the moors.

ELLEN. Why, of course! I was born here! . . . .

She joins her man by the wheelbarrow.

Adam, what do you think we ought to do about her? She's not quite all there, if you ask me.

ADAM. Well, in a way, she isn't. She's not just an ordinary woman.

ELLEN. Well, I am; and I don't like the looks of her!
Look at her now! It's no use her waiting yonder: she won't get nothing out of us. I hope *you've* not been making a fool of yourself again, giving her anything! . . . .
Adam, what have you been giving her?

ADAM. What's the use! I might as well explain to a patch of turnip. You never do understand me.

ELLEN. I think I ought to! Why, we live together, you and me.

ADAM. Well, if it's only a matter of houses . . . .

ELLEN. It's houses we have to live in! We're not like some, thank God, as gad about from place to place without no house.

ADAM. Humph! I said you wouldn't understand.

ELLEN. I'd understand, if you'd only talk plain. It's all this hinting and head-nodding gives me the wobbles. Your wry-necked way of saying things.

ADAM. It's your wry-necked way of listening to them. If I was to tell you plain, you'd only take it for lying, or something funny enough for newspapers. Look here, Ellen —You're a Bible woman: supposing I was to tell you in your own lingo? Supposing I was to tell you as I've been converted? Knocked flat as a pancake, like Balaam, like Paul! What would you say?

ELLEN. I'd say you were a godless liar. Like Ananias.

ADAM. But it's true: I am! I've seen the light! Glory alleloolia: praise the Lord!

ELLEN. Adam, think of your soul. You'll be struck or something. The light don't come to drunkards in their mocking.

ADAM. It come to me here in this forge, I tell you. Through yon doorway. Like a pillar of fire.

He follows her swift backward glance.

Ay, *she* understands. Properly speaking, it's what she means.

ELLEN. I'd like to know what a trapesing bonfire understands better than me!

ADAM. Well, there is something, if you look for it.

ELLEN. If you mean I don't dress fine, and gad about like a dolled up baggage . . . .

ADAM. I mean—Freedom. That's something you never had no dealings with in your life.

She is genuinely surprised.

ELLEN. But I am free! We're all of us free in this country. Only I don't go about complaining! Thank God, there's nothing of the grumble-gizzard in me! I'm what you might call a contented woman.

ADAM. Ay, there's where your complaint comes in.

ELLEN. Complaint, indeed! What's wrong with me?

ADAM. Little Boswell.

And he grins at his little joke.

ELLEN (*flaring*). Yes, I can see who's been converting you! Oh, it's like you! You, a respectable married man with a nice wife and home of your own, go off gallivanting with trollops as learn you to poke drunken fun at Little Boswell and the Bible! Then you come groaning about conversion!

His joy wilts like a flower.

ADAM (*mad*). Groaning! Well, I'm damned!

ELLEN. Don't you swear at me: if you *are!* . . . .
Foreigners coming here in their flaming gewgaws and flauntings, setting people agen Little Boswell! I don't care if she does hear me! I'm patriotic! I don't think we ought to be made feel badly about the place of our birth!

ADAM. Birth! What sort of birth, do you think, belongs to a bastard?

ELLEN. Adam, *will* you stop using them bad words! That's why people don't like you. Besides, they'd forget all about it, if you didn't keep on reminding them so often.

ADAM. I don't want them to forget. I want them to remember the sort of man Little Boswell lives on.

ELLEN. Little Boswell's all right, if other folk didn't come pushing their noses in. Meddling! . . . .
I never could abide ear-rings, anyway. They don't seem quite respectable to me.

ADAM. Ellen, did you ever take a good look at Little Boswell? Did you look at it just now, as you come up?

ELLEN. I had enough to do, worriting my inside out, without gaping at landscapes. Contentment!—That's the trouble with you, Adam: you got none. *I* never found nothing wrong in Little Boswell; and Heaven knows, I'm particular!

ADAM. Beelzebub! There'd have to be some alterations, to content me!

ELLEN (*exasperated*). Such as what now?

Which gives him his opportunity.

ADAM. Well, I'd build it different, to begin with. All them flyblown pigsties, you call your houses— Human beings hadn't ought to live in them holes: not without kicking up a shindy! I'd have something more solid: something to last: take a pride in. What do you say now to Walls of Marble and seven big Gates of Gold? . . . .

He breaks through her inarticulate gasping.

Ay, there'd be no mistaking that, would there? That would be something *like* a city!

ELLEN. Every blessed drop of it's gone clean up into his head!

ADAM. And what's a city doing, dumped down in the bottom of a valley, like a rubbage heap? Too low! No fresh air to it! I'd have it stuck up somewhere to be seen. High! Top of the hill yonder: that's the place for a city: so as the sun might rise upon the whiteness of them walls, and the glittering of them golden gates.

ELLEN. Adam, are you talking about the New Jerusalem?

ADAM. I'm talking about the city yonder, waiting for the builder.

They are gazing upward, through the imaginary window.

Ellen. If you're asking for something pretty to look at, there's a flag. What more do you want?

Adam. Ay, any slave can set a flag flapping. It takes a king to build a city.

Ellen. Yes, I suppose yon flag don't suit you now.

Adam. Well, I was thinking maybe a little soap and water . . . .

Ellen. There you go! Then you wonder why you get yourself disliked!

Adam. Oh, I know the poison brewing for me yonder! What did Little Boswell ever know about flags, but waving them? It's men like me as honors flags. Men as 'll have them clean.

Ellen. Well, if you'd only learn to tell them nicely.

Adam. There's plenty to tell them nicely. My God, there's room in the world for one like me.

Ellen. But you get so excited. Why won't you be like other people? You don't see them getting excited.

Adam. Them! A fat lot of excitement you could squeeze out of a load of dead mummies. The things they rot by have been dust hundreds of year. They don't know what day they're in: what hour.
Do you know what's wanting in Little Boswell?

Ellen. Something funny, I'll be bound! What?

Naomi *flashes round as he replies.*

Adam. A clock!—Yes, c-l-o-c-k, clock! Something to wake these corpses from their graves. Something to resurrect them. Something loud and terrible, to tell them the time of day.

Hark! . . . .

The Sunday School clock drones the three-quarters, dismally.

Do you hear it? Yon old passing bell down at the Sunday School, telling a quarter to five. You believe that, don't you? Well, it's a liar: it's nine minutes to.

What's wanted in this place, I tell you, is a clock. Built up high in the tower of the City Hall, that's where it should be: up yonder: among the blazing stars. No more of yon sort, telling lies! A clock with a living heart inside it, beating time: a clock with a living tongue to it, clamoring tune: something as 'll dare to tell the truth.

Ellen. Adam, have you been drinking again this morning?

Adam. Yes: I am filled with new wine! Like them other drunkards on the Day of Pentecost.

Ellen. Adam, it's blasphemy!

Adam. Ay, it was then. It always will be, when you speak the truth.

Ellen. God forgive him!

Emerging from the shadows, Naomi *now stands between them.*

Naomi. Well, have you found him?

Ellen. It's you! What have you been doing with him? He's not the same man.

NAOMI. Maybe he's bewitched, or star-struck, or sold himself to some spirit.

ELLEN. What are you blathering about, you heathen hussy? There isn't such things nowadays.

NAOMI. Well, names change, same as men.

ELLEN. I don't want to talk with you. What business have you meddling with other people's husbands, anyway? That's what I want to know.

NAOMI. Why, I've had people's husbands journeying with me, out in this wilderness, afore to-day.

Symbolism is not ELLEN'S *strong point.*

ELLEN. Well, what with her wilderness and his marble palaces, blessed if I know whether I'm on my heels or my head! Tell me, are you immoral or only daft? Don't you know this is a forge? Just an ordinary, messy, blacksmith's forge?

NAOMI. Ay, with crags for anvils, and great thunderbolts for hammers. Look! There's lightning playing about him now.

ELLEN. Take your evil eye off my man! He's nothing to do with you. Let him be, I tell you! He's mine: not yours!

NAOMI. Yours, house-fly! Watch if he's yours! . . . .

And she rivets her gaze upon him.

ELLEN. Adam, answer her. Don't let her stand magging there. Tell her the truth. Tell her as you belong to me.

NAOMI. It's too late. He passed that milestone hours ago. Little Boswell don't hold him no more. He belongs to someone else.

ELLEN. It's a lie! Who?

NAOMI. Someone you never dreamed of. Himself.

ADAM. Myself! . . . .

NAOMI's eyes have never left him. Nor do they now.

NAOMI. I known men belong that way, one sort or the other, down and down the years.

ELLEN. That's unscriptural, at any rate! "Ye are not your own; but bought with a price."

She serves this up with vinegar.

NAOMI. Oh, there's price paid, sure enough. When men belong to themselves.

ELLEN. Yes, no-one to watch over them. I know!

NAOMI. They get watched over.

Adam wakes as from a trance.

ADAM. What did they do? Them men—down and down the years . . . .

NAOMI. It was the way they took me. Sometimes they found me the barren mother of dead Idols; and they perished, breaking them. Sometimes they begat upon me—Living Children!

ELLEN. All this is so much double Dutch to me.

ADAM. It's as simple as the Book of Revelations.

ELLEN. Well, I like people to talk plain out what they mean.

ADAM. If she was to talk plain out what she means, somebody'd be getting locked up.

ELLEN. Good job, too! Her and her idols! Why, we got none nowadays. Only Roman Catholics.

Thank heaven, I'm Protestant, and was brought up respectable to know God.

NAOMI. Then you'd best keep your eyes open. He's coming. Don't mistake Him.

ELLEN. Thank you, I don't want you teaching me about God! What should I be likely to mistake Him for?

NAOMI. Abomination maybe; or ruin. Maybe the devil.

ELLEN. Don't you stand jeering at me, Jezebel Rag-bags! I'm a religious woman, I'd have you understand: I know all about God. His still small voice come to me when I was only half your age. And I wasn't no chicken, neither!

NAOMI. His voice don't always come so still and small. Sometimes it come in cracking thunder and the clattering of hailstones. He's not all silence, God! He's slow: He takes a long time getting His breath; but He can shout. I known God's voice make windows rattle, and set the comfortable houses of men trembling from base to beam. When He's angry! When things gone too far! He don't leave off easy, when He speaks that way. Not till He done.

Ay, and strange mouths He uses, God! Don't always pick respectable! Any old jawbone 'll do for Him, so long it wags proper. Riffraff: play-folk: men in murderers' cages! I seen Him twist the mouths of gutter-dogs and harlots to His use: I seen men run stark mad, with Him buzzing upon their lips. Not all music, neither! Sometimes the roaring of wild beasts made drunk with slaughter: pouring through the fat cities: ravening! When God's angry! When He's out shouting! In the streets! In Little Boswell!

ELLEN. Adam, don't listen to her. Don't you see? She's mad!

ADAM. Well, I'm drunk. So we're a pair.
Come, don't stand shivering that way. What are you afraid of? Don't you see the beauty of her?

ELLEN. Beauty! She's the abomination out of the Bible!

ADAM. Why, what's wrong with her?

ELLEN. It's her eyes. I don't like the way she's looking at you. Nobody ever looks like that in Little Boswell. I don't like the way she dresses herself. I don't like the color. Why, it's—it's . . . .

ADAM. Well, you're not a bull, are you, to mind a bit of color?

ELLEN. None of us in Little Boswell ever fancied that color. It's one of the things we—we don't do.

NAOMI. You can't escape it. It's glowing all over the world. Isn't it time you begun learning what it rightly means?

ELLEN. It means the enticement of the devil. It means the destruction of houses. "The deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish."

NAOMI. It means the Living Blood, as makes all mankind one.

ELLEN. Adam, stir yourself! Why don't you send her away?

ADAM. Where to? You can't send anything like that away. Not when it's once in the world.

ELLEN. There's plenty of other places. What's Little Boswell done, to be upset like this?

ADAM. Send her away! You might as well try and shift the burning sun.

ELLEN. We've got a policeman. What's a policeman for?

NAOMI. He's been tried, time and again. Hangmen, too. But they don't get the right grip somehow. Not on my sort. Even the grave don't seem able to hold me.

ELLEN. There must be some way, if I could only . . . .

NAOMI. You can't think of anything new. It's no use: I'm here. You'd better face me.

ELLEN. Why are you here at all? That's what I've been wondering, all along?

NAOMI. Because it's the hour.

ELLEN. What hour?

NAOMI. Yours. Little Boswell's. The hour when you got to choose.

ELLEN. Choose what?

NAOMI. Idols or Living Children.

ELLEN *looks at at her curiously.*

ELLEN. What do you know about children?

NAOMI. What do you?

ELLEN. Never you mind about me. Do you call yourself a single woman?

NAOMI. I walk alone.

ELLEN. Well, I'm a married woman; and let me tell you, children don't always drop down from heaven by choosing.

Naomi. Ay, that's something beyond Little Boswell. Idols, maybe! Bibles and flags and houses. Even little limbs and mouths as learn to move and babble like yourselves. But nothing alive! Nothing as 'll save you in the hour your idols crumble. That takes more than Little Boswell. That's bastard's labor. On'y anguish and a mighty longing can kindle living children.

Ellen (*fiercely*). Well. *I* long!

Naomi (*more fiercely*). What have you borne him?

Ellen. Bearing isn't the only proof of love!

Naomi. It's the on'y proof love knows.

Ellen. Yes, I see your hinting. Because I'm childless! You, the single woman as walks alone, luring into the dark by-ways! Oh, I know you, wrecker of men's homes! Anyway, you won't lure here! Not with my man, Doll-of-the-ditch! I'm his lawful married wife, I'd have you know: if I *am* only barren!

Naomi. By God's deep dawn and all the glimmerings of it, but *I'm* not barren to him!

Ellen. What do you mean, you slut?

Naomi. The dayspring! I have heard the living heartbeat of his child.

Ellen. Adam, don't stand answerless there, like a stuck sign-post. Be a man! Call her a liar!

Adam. There isn't no answer. I'm trying to piece it all out in my mind.

Ellen. Piece what out?

Adam. About her and me.

Ellen. Good gracious, you don't think I believe . . . . How long have you known the woman!

Adam. That's the point. If you'd asked me that question half an hour ago, I'd have said about ten minutes.

Ellen. There, I know: she *is* a liar.

Naomi. And if she was to ask you now?

Adam. Why, now . . . .
I seem to have known you, one time and another, since the beginning of the world.

Ellen. Oh, what's the use, with a couple of loonies! I'm done!

And she plumps down on the anvil.
Adam *addresses* Naomi *as in a dream.*

Adam. Back in the womb of my mother, it begun. In yon hill. Properly speaking, yon hill *was* my mother. She bore me: she grew big with me: I come up out of the black guts of the earth, like a lump of metal. Deep down, burrowing in the dark, a slave: that's the way I was then: under the Romans. And up above me, in the sweet air, something watching for me, waiting; and I never knew you. But I climbed out into the light— You drawed me. And the Romans were gone. And there was lead in my hands.
Next, come them others. They ground me back into my own soil—Mine: they stole it from me. I labored for them; and for wage, they bound fresh bonds upon me: oaths, and fears, and bits of lawyer's paper. In the light of day, on the good green earth, a shackled man, laboring, without no land of his own. And you come once more, unbeknowns to me. You come many times. And I fought and

fell, and rose again like Christ; until my blood's huge waves engulfed them. And they were washed away like sand. But there were drills for seeding, and reapers for the harvest. And I made them.

And now, this last bondage—Little Boswell. Little Boswell, barren with idols, waiting to be broken; and yonder, slumbering, that unborn voice of iron. And you come to me again; like you done last night: up on the moor: in the dews and the starlight: softly like a bride. And in the dawn, at last I know you.

The wine of Ellen's *wrath, fermented, now bursts the bottle.*

Ellen. No, I'm not done! Not so long as there's a tongue wagging inside my God-given head! . . . .

What was that about last night?

Adam. I spoke plain enough. Good Lord, you'd think it was something as wasn't happening in every household in the land, to see her carrying on!

Ellen. Not in my household! Not while I'm in it! There'll be nothing of that color hanging about Number Three, Paradise Terrace: not so long as there's a flat-iron left! I'll learn your sinful soul what Little Boswell means by Home!

Adam. Ellen, will you . . . .

Ellen. No, I won't! You've been talking your head off all the morning: now I'll talk mine. Oh, I may be blind and dull: I may be only a poor doting door-mat for trampling brutes of husbands to wipe their dirty boots on; but thank God, I am respectable!

Adam. I'm jiggered! You'd think to hear her . . . .

ELLEN. Think! You never stop to think! It's not what *you* think! It's other people. What d'you suppose all them out there are going to think of you?

She flings a large infuriated gesture through the imaginary window.

ADAM. Them! I'll twist them inside out with thinking, before I've done with them. Whether they understand, or no.

ELLEN. Yes, shout it through the window, do! Let all the world know the kind of husband you are! It's bad companions, that's what it is. Liquoring roisters talking politics and disrespect for happy homes, down at the pot-house. Them, and the wicked books you're always addling over! And yon razzle-dazzle—with her rings!

But I'll not stand it! Don't you think I'm a fool, because I'm your wife. Wives have a lot to say for themselves, let me tell you. They have more at the back of them than you reckon. There's all Little Boswell at the back of me. Little Boswell won't see me put upon like this— No, not for twenty gipsy women!

ADAM *crosses over to her angrily.*

ADAM. Look here, Ellen, can't you understand a simple little thing like . . . .

ELLEN. Don't you come nigh me! Drunken! Unclean! You and your brazen trollops!

ADAM (*roughly*). Oh, all right: you're like the rest of them. It's no use trying to explain any little thing straightforward, in this hole!

And he goes and sulks in the doorway. ELLEN *concentrates on* NAOMI.

Ellen. And as for you, gipsy, I know your meaning now! Nice lot of mystery you were making, weren't you? Well, I see through your mystery. I've heard of you before: read about you—Book of Revelations, seventeen-five, it was. Your sort of mystery comes out of wicked Babylon! There's a word for it: a name for your sort: a name too bad for a decent woman's lips! But it's in the Bible, right enough! . . . .

Oh, you can look at me with your eyes! I'm not afraid of you no longer, now I know you! So take care! I've got friends at the back of me, as 'll make short work of you—Scarlet Woman!

Naomi. Take care, you! There's something at the back of me, also!

And Ellen *stands silent at last, as under a spell.* Adam *growls ironically from the doorway.*

Adam. Well, they're coming! *Your* friends, Ellen. I can see them down the road.

Ellen (*mechanically*). My friends! Who? . . . .

Adam. Some of the black eyes and bloody noses from last night's jubilee.

Ellen *wakes up with a jerk.*

Ellen. What do you know about last night's jubilee?

Adam. I was there. You'll be hearing by and bye.

Ellen. You went drunk into the Sunday School!

Adam. No, I was only mad then: I got drunk afterwards. Wasn't good liquor, neither.

Howsomever, I got up steam enough to let off a bit of my mind.

ELLEN. Adam, you wouldn't dare!

ADAM. Why, what's the matter with my mind?

ELLEN. What wickedness was it brought *you* to Sunday School?

ADAM. Why, to save souls, of course. I thought the Constituted Sons of Freedom would like to hear the word of God. So I told them.

ELLEN. He's taken the bread smack out of our mouths!

ADAM. Then we'll chew grass like their other cattle.

ELLEN. So that's why their lights were on all night! I thought it couldn't 'a' been all jubilee.

An illumination comes to her:

Adam, they've been praying for you!

ADAM. Telling God about me, eh? Well, they'd have to get back at me someway.

ELLEN. Don't blaspheme, man!

ADAM. I can't help it, woman. I'm a true believer.

A babble of voices is heard approaching, outside.

ELLEN (*fearfully*). Who are they?

ADAM. Three of the Sons. I'll name them for you. Like a wax-work show.

And he does so, as they enter, one by one.

Nathaniel Dank, lawyer. Little Boswell's notion of constituted freedom.

Sammy Snark, editor of the *Little Boswell Free Press*. Penny a line freedom.

Jeremiah Jones with a black eye. Ironmonger: boss of the Sunday School; and first trombone of the MacDabble Musical Club—all knocked into one. Makes free with other people's brains.

Each wheels round as he is named, facing ADAM, *who is left of the big doorway.*

DANK *is a little dapper man, baldheaded, with a twisted lip.* SNARK *is florid, with a big watch-chain and a squeaky voice. He stands to the right of* DANK. JEREMIAH JONES *has a good face, thin, ascetic: one black eye; and a voice like an organ. He passes by the others, and stands left of the group.*

JONES. Yes, my man, I've had nothing but your language running in my head all night long!

ADAM. You can heave it *out* of your head a thousand nights long, and they won't mistake it for yours, Jeremiah.

SNARK. What did I tell you! You'll get nothing out of him but dissertations and double meanings.

DANK. Leave him to me, Snark— Just one moment, brother Jones—I'll deal with him. Now sir, come over here to your own anvil, and be . . . .
Well, upon my word! . . . .

He has turned, and sees NAOMI *there.*
The others turn like automata.

SNARK. Upon mine! . . . .

JONES. Mine, too!

He feels safe, with public opinion at the back of him.

He and Snark *speak together:*

Both. Who is the gipsy woman?

Dank (*slowly*). Yes, who is this—highly lurid female?

Naomi. Do you want to know? I'm something you all heard of, many a time. On'y you thought I was long ago!—Shut up in your books and Bibles, or stamped out by policemen, or nailed to rot on stretching arms of wood. You didn't dream I was so nigh. Well, I'm here in your Little Boswell, at last. Up agen your very doors! Since you'm fond of naming things correct, you'd better call me same as *she* did—Scarlet Woman!

The sun rises. It breaks through the open and imaginary windows, flooding her with light. She is like a sign in blood.

Dank. We didn't come here to talk Scripture with you, woman. We came here to talk . . . .

But the words wither on his twisted lip.

Naomi. All right: I can watch a spell longer. Go on with your talking, Little Boswell!

She settles herself upon the anvil, the "wild thing" shining in her eyes. The sunlight burns upon her for a moment, and then wanes behind a cloud.

The Sunday School clock drones five.

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Second Act.

THE THIRD ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. The day is clear, though clouded. ADAM *is in the doorway. To the left below him, the Constituted Sons stand rooted as before: Editor* SNARK, *Lawyer* DANK, *Sunday School* JONES. *They face the Scarlet Woman at the anvil.* ELLEN *is by the carpenter's horse.*

DANK. Hm! I think I understand.

SNARK. So do I. The situation's worth a column, as it stands at this moment.

JONES. I don't agree with you. I consider she's a public outrage, and her language disgusting.

SNARK. That's good enough for my purpose. I'm yellow, and I don't mind who knows it. Yellow and unashamed! Keeping me up all night, listening to a lot of jaw!

JONES. We've been sitting up too! I'm ready to drop.

SNARK. I wish you'd dropped nine hours ago. Look here! Most of it your cackle and *his!*

He whips out his notebook savagely.

JONES. Notwithstanding, I consider that woman no fit subject for discussion before the young. If you don't know your Bible, I do.

SNARK. I'll make it an interview with her, if I like. I know when I'm on a snap, without *you!* . . . . Whereabouts in the Bible was that?

DANK. Tut, tut, gentlemen: this is no time for idle prattling.

Snark. Oh, shut it! We've had nothing else but prattling from you since midnight. Withered old ninepin!

Dank. How dare you defame me, sir? I am no ninepin!

Adam. And then they talk about the anarchy of the lower classes!

They all three remember him at once.

Trio. Ah! . . . .

Dank. Which brings us to the point of our visit.

Ellen *moves up swiftly to* Adam.

Ellen. Now be careful. I'm not friends with you; but I don't want you a bigger fool than you are.

Snark (*writing*). See! His own wife knows him!

Ellen. It wasn't meant for your ears, Mr. Smarty!

Adam. I'll be careful! I won't let a word slip from me as I don't mean.

He goes down to the carpenter's horse, straddles it, and lights his pipe.

Now, Sons of Freedom! Spit it out.

Dank. Prisoner—I mean blacksmith: don't be noisy!

Adam. Can't help it, your honor: it's my trade.

Dank *frowns forensically upon him, and opens the case for Little Boswell.*

Dank. Now, we had better confine ourselves strictly to the point at issue. The trouble with proceedings of this informal kind is that the lay mind lacks directness. Now the point is . . . . But be seated, gentlemen. Samuel Snark — No, there: on the nail-keg. Jeremiah Jones . . . .

> Jeremiah *looks round vaguely, then makes a line for the wheelbarrow.*

Better wheel it up here. There's nothing like being together; and your black eye is evidence. I'll take the—er—mustard-box.

> *But* Adam *is troubled about the perambulations of* Jeremiah.

Adam. Here, mind them bricks, now. Whoa! . . . .

> *Which pulls him up with a bump.*

You're a good lifter, ironmonger; but you'll never do for a cart-horse.

Jones. I will not stand tamely here, taking your . . . .

> *And he tumbles back into the bricks.*

Adam. That's all right, trombone: take it sitting. You're welcome to all the wheelbarrows *I* ever made. It's when you pinch my patents, I object.

Jones. I protest on my word of honor as an ironmonger . . . .

Adam. No: not with me, Jeremiah! Or would you like me to hand over the proofs to Sammy?

Dank. All of this is beside the point. The point is . . . .

Snark. Devil take this keg. It's bristling with bayonets!

Dank (*testily*). You're as well off as we are! Look at me! Color of your rag!

He scrabbles the sides of the mustard-box, and shows his paws.

The point I wish to press home . . . .

SNARK. Well, I'm damned if I'll sit on it. They are a yard long.

He goes and squats on the handle of JEREMIAH'S *barrow. It promptly turns over.*

JONES. Of all the lumbering elephants I ever . . . .

SNARK. How the blazes was I to know the bricks wouldn't balance us? Do you think I go about carrying the avoirdupois of bricks in my head all day long? Silly devil!

JONES. Don't you say devil to me! Language like that!

SNARK. I'm not one of your Sunday School brats! I'm a newspaper man: words mean nothing to me. Ass! Don't know *how* to sit on a wheelbarrow! There! . . . .

He has built himself a little throne of bricks.

And now I suppose my trousers will be scarlet!

He glares at NAOMI *as though she were the cause.*

DANK (*icily*). The point I had on the tip of my tongue, before this trifling digression . . . .

SNARK. Well, I'm syndicated! Who started the digression? It was *you* made us all sit down.

DANK (*with exasperated distinctness*). The point I had on the tip of my . . . .

SNARK'S *snorting interruption, checked by* JONES, *admits a melodious note from* ADAM.

ADAM. He'll never get that point off his tongue: not if he uses tweezers.

SNARK. I will not be gagged. I—will—talk! He's been badgering us with his points all the blessed night. Do you think I'm going to lose my beauty sleep for nothing? Just because he's a lawyer, and can mess about as he pleases, with a row of knock-kneed little witnesses, he fancies he's the whole show. He's not! *I* am. I stand for the freedom of the press.

DANK (*frigidly*). And I sir, stand for freedom too! Freedom of the kind they recognize in—courts of justice.

JEREMIAH *by this time has subdued his spirit to a patient smile.*

JONES. I am afraid we are all getting a little excited. Brethren, let us smile. I stand for the freedom that makes us kind to one another.

SNARK. Except in the ironmongery, where you are a well-known sweater!

He is rewarded with a nasty saved look.

ADAM. Would you like to hear anything about my kind?

Their unanimity claps like thunder.

TRIO. No sir!

ADAM. I thought I'd make them brothers again.

ELLEN. Hold your tongue! Can't you see they're mad as May-bugs?

SNARK. Don't you call me May-bug! I'm not so sure that you ought to be here at all.

ELLEN. It's our forge. Fine thing, when you can't speak a few words in your own forge!

SNARK. We've had enough words from your family already. If you think you are going to add your mite . . . .

ADAM. Here, don't you get meddling with my wife!

SNARK. Who wants to meddle with your wife? But if she imagines for one moment . . . .

DANK. In strict law, this forge, being in point of fact their own . . . .

SNARK. I don't care a curse about that! I'd push my nose into the bedroom of the angel Gabriel for twopence!

ELLEN. Well, I'm not going to be stopped saying my bit: not for all the newspapers in the world! And that's flat, Mr. Falsetto!

They burst into a quintette,[1] *all except* NAOMI *babbling together. The heavens nearly fall; but justice prevails.*

DANK. Please, please! Gentlemen, please, please, please! . . . .

When quiet is restored, he commences:

Every single word of this is totally beside the . . . .

SNARK. Hell, I've had enough of you! If it's points you're after— Sit on them! . . . .

He plants him firmly on the nail-keg.

DANK. Oh! This is assault and battery!

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[1] For quintette, see end of play, p. 313.

SNARK. I'll make it murder, if there's one more point from you till I've done. Now, I've warned you!

The law expostulates pathetically; but the press flaps him down, and proceeds to spread sweetness and light.

I take it, we all understand very clearly what we're here for. There's no need for any humbug about it— The truth, the disgusting truth: that's my motto. Ostensibly, we are here to sit in calm dispassionate judgment; but really to disgorge our spleen upon that blackguard parading as a blacksmith. He's kept me one whole night without a wink: I've scribbled myself paralytic because of him: my digestion at this moment is one intolerable pang of Sunday School milk-pap and jubilee buns; and I tell you plainly, he'll get nothing but gyp from me!

Are you with me, Jeremiah?

JONES. Ungrudgingly!

SNARK. You, Dank?

DANK. Reluctantly—yes sir!

And he tries to escape from the keg.

SNARK. No, you don't!

And he pops him back again.

Now, we've heard a lot from this fellow, one time and another, of what he is pleased to consider freedom. The subject seems to be in the air: we've been talking about it ourselves: we've heard of nothing else all night long. I don't know how it is with you others; but my mind is so constituted, that if I have to think of one thing for more than five consecutive minutes, it makes my stomach turn.

It's the way I'm built: I don't mind confessing it: I'm liverish. Well now, I'm going to put an end to this little show, see! I'll let this rhetorical blacksmith know just what Little Boswell means by freedom. I'll make him look at freedom for once in his life with Little Boswell's eyes, if it costs me ten columns!

He stops to mop his exuding brow.

Adam. Now, he's the bloke as tells you I'm longwinded!

Snark. Curse your filthy soul!

Adam. And my language that bad I hadn't ought to live!

Snark. Don't you think you're going to stop me, by chipping in with funny lines. I'm going to finish my little lecture about freedom, if I burst. I'll teach you to belittle that precious heritage for which the sires of Little Boswell bled! Yes sir, freedom! Freedom herself, whose noblest boast it is, that, panoplied in Jove's immortal thunders, she never hurt a fly! . . . .

Dank *forgets his anguish in a burst of patriotism.* Jeremiah *seconds him sepulchrally.*

Dank. Hip, hip, hooray!

Jones. Hear, hear!

This emboldens Snark *to further song.*

Snark. The charter of our peculiar joys, the guardian of our faith, she has made us what we are! Freedom! None of your red flag blasphemy and sedition! But freedom as she is understood among her Constituted Sons of Little Boswell, above whose consecrated heads there proudly floats and flaps and flutters . . . . However, I reserve that for the last paragraph.

JONES. Oh, go on, Samuel! I always like that bit best.

SNARK. Later, Jeremiah. I won't fail you! . . . . What do these agitators want, I ask you? Do they realize they are driving trade smack out of the country? They talk about freedom! What about freedom of contract? What about free libraries? Free trade? Protection, even!—Thank God, I'm no partisan: I can accommodate myself to any change of public sentiment; and generally do! So long as there's backbone to it—financially. But all this socialism and syndicalism and trades-union tommy-rot! What about the inexorable law of supply and demand? What about bimetallism, post-impressionism, the differential calculus? And another thing: If you divided out everything equally to-day, by to-morrow morning . . . . Well, perhaps you've heard that argument before.

I tell you, the real trouble with the workingman is laziness. He boozes, he beats his wife, he gads about in automobiles stirring strife and class hatred; but he won't work.

ADAM. Won't what? Where the devil d'you think all these things come from? Dropped out of the skies?

JONES. Yes, and who finds you work? Me! Don't I take from you almost everything you make?

ADAM. You do, Jeremiah! You play the happy smiler with it, before you give it to the public; but you certainly do.

DANK. Of course, Jones, as a mere consumer, I . . . .

JONES. You have nothing whatever to do with it, Dank. Political economy as it's known in business takes no account of the consumer. *He* makes what *I* find profitable; and *you* get what you can.

DANK. There's a fallacy there somewhere, I'm sure.

JONES. Probably! But I'm in the trade!

ADAM. But I thought Sammy yonder said something about supply and demand.

JONES. That argument is only used to squelch the preposterous claims of the proletarian.

ADAM. Them long words mean me, don't they? Well now, supposing I was to stop the supplies?

JONES. It would be outrageous! You'd stagnate trade!

ADAM. Ungrudgingly! Would it be unconstitutional, lawyer?

DANK. Strictly, no; but very inconsiderate! The consumer would certainly object.

ADAM. What does the consumer do for me?

JONES. He and I together keep you in bread and butter; and I regret to add—abominable beer!

ADAM. Quite right there, Jerry. The liquor I swiped last night was thick enough to choke a giraffe.

DANK. There's one thing positive. If you attempted any such thing as you have hinted, all Little Boswell would unite to oppose you. Yes sir, and with armed force, if necessary.

ADAM. Whose armed force?

DANK. Why ours, the constitution's, of course!

ADAM. I thought you said it wasn't unconstitutional.

DANK. Don't you sit sophisticating about the constitution with me, sir! I'm here for that purpose. It's your business to blow your dirty bellows, and obey!

ADAM. In other words, there's a ruling class as runs the constitution any damned way it likes; and a slaving class as keeps them filled with vittles for doing so. And then you have the blasted sauce to call yourselves a democracy! Why, I feed all you sleek fat loafers! Here am I sweating out my gizzard to stuff a lot of nannygoats with tripe and onions and all the luxuries of the land.

DANK (*angry*). Let me tell you sir, the consumer will not for one moment brook . . . .

JONES (*shouting him down*). I maintain it is the employer, the captain of industry, who . . . .

ADAM (*bellowing*). What about me, the bloke as does the job?

They are all three fisting the air.

SNARK. Is all this going to degenerate into a sociological discussion, or is anything going to be done? I want to see things moving. Action: that's my watchword.

ADAM. What do you want me to do? Hit you with a sledge hammer?

SNARK. I want you to sit still for ten minutes if you can, you jumping buffalo, while I perorate about the flag! . . . . Listen, Jeremiah. You'll find this useful for one of your Pleasant Sunday Entertainments for the Young.

JONES. By all means. You couldn't have chosen a more appropriate moment.

He composes himself beatifically; and SNARK *is about to blossom, when* DANK *worms in.*

DANK. The thing I'm worrying about is: What's the woman doing in the place, all this time?

SNARK. Dank, do you realize you are damming the flow of a serious apostrophe to freedom?

DANK. Well, but she's done nothing since her last cryptic remark but sit there watching us. I don't want to carp; but surely, that's not good form. If she's here for some purpose, let her out with it. If not, hadn't she better go away?

SNARK. What do you say? Do you want to?

NAOMI. Yes.

But she remains motionless.

SNARK. Well, are you going?

NAOMI. No.

SNARK. What do you propose doing then? Stick on that anvil forever?

NAOMI. Maybe.

And picking up the fallen sledge hammer, she sits watching still.

JONES. Snark, never mind that female on the anvil. Tell us about freedom and the flag.

SNARK. How the blue-pencil can I gather my wits to tell you anything with Dank about? I never can open my head for a few patriotic observations without some ass braying! Silly old messer! Philandering with women, when there's work to be done!

DANK. I never philandered with her!

SNARK. It 'll take me till six o'clock to-morrow morning, as it is—writing up last night's tosh: without wasting time now! Oh, bag your head!

Dank. Not until you apologize for defaming my character, sir!

Snark. I'll see you burning first! And what's more, here go twelve thousand nine hundred and forty-two words—not counting coughs and stammers—of the most putrid rot ever spluttered from a public platform! There! That's how much of *you* last night goes down the giddy pathway of immortality!

And he tears reams from his notebook.

Dank. Good! No more announcements in your yellow rag!

Snark. My Lord, we can live without lawyers, so long as there's a theatre in the world!

Dank. You are a squeaking puff-ball, sir!

Snark. Oh, tut, tut! Gas-bag!

Dank. Tut, tut, to you, sir! Scribbler!

And he snaps his fingers at him boldly.

Jones (*mildly*). In view of the somewhat heated atmosphere, perhaps the moment is opportune for a little prayer.

Dank *and* Snark *jump on him at once.*

Both. No, you don't!

Snark. We know your prayers!

Jones (*violently*). Oh, all right! Pair of blatant fire-proof atheists, bound for the bottomless abyss!

SNARK. Fire-proof, blatant, am I? Well then, here goes Jeremiah! And I'll see the Constituted Sons with crowns of glory before I publish a battered semicolon!

The notebook lies demolished on the ground. They glower at one another. ADAM *makes himself pleasant meanwhile.*

ADAM. What I want to know is: How much an hour am I going to get for the use of my forge?

This provides an outlet for them.

TRIO. Silence, sir!

ADAM. Why, I haven't said more than half a dozen words since you come into the place. And then they call me a talker!

JONES. We heard enough of you last night! Enough to last us a lifetime.

He fondles his black eye.

ADAM. I . . . .

DANK. It's no use, your bursting out like that. We will not listen to you.

ADAM. If . . . .

SNARK. There he goes again! He'll keep us chattering here a twelvemonth, if he can only get an audience.

ADAM. You . . . .

TRIO. We—will—not—listen to you!

ADAM. You know, you'll be getting me really mad soon. It's about time I begun playing the bull again!

SNARK. Don't listen to him, lawyer. Stop your ears, Jeremiah. *You* know what he is when once he gets up into the pulpit.

ADAM. Listen, you constituted fatheads!

They begin dancing dithyrambs before him.

SNARK. We will not! Socialist! Flouter of flags!

JONES. Atheist! Blasphemer! Person obviously insincere!

DANK. Your taste is execrable! You go about spreading unpalatable ideas!

SNARK. I shouldn't wonder if your uncle stole potatoes; and I suspect you yourself of hideous immorality.

JONES. I don't like the cut of his hair! I don't like his voice! His voice nearly drove the MacDabble Musical Club to irrevocable schism!

SNARK. Hypocrite! He talks of God!

JONES. Egoist! He says, I!

SNARK. Undesirable citizen!

JONES. He drinks beer! Swears! Pokes fun!

TRIO. Anarchist! Grrrr! . . . .

ELLEN'S *blood can't stand this anyhow.*

ELLEN. And who are you, I'd like to know, as can stand barefaced there, like a row of cocoanut shies, calling my man names?

JONES. Sister, I'm shocked! *You!* . . . .

ELLEN. Don't you sister me, Mr. Kindface Bottom-

Note-of-a-Bassoon! Nice thing, Little Boswell's coming to, when a row of three-a-penny old Aunt Sallies can get up on their hind legs and call my man names!

DANK. Surely you'll never take *his* part against *us?*

ELLEN. I've heard of it being done. There's a many women do take husbands' parts, poor fools! I'm respectably joined together in holy matrimony, I am; and I don't care who knows it! Even if he do talk through his hat.

SNARK *pounces on a piece of notebook.*

SNARK (*scribbling*). You admit that, do you?

ELLEN. I don't admit nothing to you, Samuel Snark! I'm not afraid of your old newspapers, don't you believe it! "Beware of the scribes: the same shall receive greater damnation." That's what the Bible says about *you.*

SNARK. This pretentious religiosity won't wash with me!

ELLEN. Won't it? Well then, this not being Sunday, and no need for lying, put this in your tub of soap-suds!—I never did like you, Mr. Billy-clever-goat: no, not that much! . . . .

She measures him the tip of her thumb.

I think that part in the *Little Boswell Free Press* called "Our Woman's Column," silly! I believe it's written by a man.

SNARK *grabs up a bit more notebook.*

SNARK. I'll immortalize you for that! (*Does so.*)

ELLEN. You! Why, they'll only know of you because I called you billygoat.

DANK. My good woman, all these recriminations . . . .

Ellen. Don't you call me a good woman! I'm no woman of yours, good or bad: if you do make duck's eyes at me, down chapel yonder, when I got my bonnet on. Bald-headed old gentleman like you, as ought to know better!

Dank. I never in all my life made the slightest improper . . . .

Ellen. Oh yes, you did! Me and my next-door neighbor watch for it. You and your sly ways! Oh, you're talked about, I can tell you! You're known all over the village for a lickerish old rip.

Dank. This is libel! This calls for fire from God! It is indictable under the law.

Adam. Ellen, you're a wonder! I couldn't 'a' done it better myself!

She turns on him, as on the others.

Ellen. I know what sort of a wonder I am, without no honeying from you. Oh, but I'm a fool, a born blind fool, taking you all so serious! Wasting good breath as might be cooking breakfast on a cradleful of squabbling grown up babies!

Adam. Ellen! D'you mean to say you don't discern in this the first deep mutterings of the revolution?

Ellen. First my grandmother! Why, I'm your wife, man! Little boy's big talk don't take me in!

Adam (*angry*). Look here, Ellen! . . . .

Ellen (*angrier*). Don't you Ellen me! I've had enough to put up with from you for one day! I'm not friends with you. *You know what for!*

Adam. But . . . .

ELLEN. Now, you'll only make me say things I hadn't ought to. You know what I am when I lose my head! . . . . No, I won't! I'm going home to get the breakfast. It'll be ready soon as you men done talking. And it's tripe and onions!

> *She sniffs impartially at all combatants, and is about to turn away, when she bethinks her of a word for* NAOMI:

As for you, you hussy, I've been watching you while these gowks were gassing; and I don't think so bad of you, as I did. I liked the way you give them beltinker, when they first come in. That bit was fine. And the sun rising and all! . . . . Lord, if I could talk like you, I'd give them what for! . . . . All the same, don't take yon looby of mine too serious. I've seen them caught by big eyes and ear-rings before now. Well, it don't last! . . . . You'd best come down and get a bite before you go.

Them and their revolutions! It's about time as women took hold in Little Boswell! Look at 'em! Revolutions! Any baby boy's tin trumpet's loud enough to blow down yon Jericho! Lot of men!

> *She flounces out of the forge. A moment later,* NAOMI *follows to the doorway, watching her down the road. There is silence in Little Boswell for half a second. Then the vials pour forth.*

JONES. There go the first-fruits of your foul teaching!

DANK. Yes, what can you think of a man, whose own wife makes public parade of his infamy?

SNARK (*livid with cacoëthes*). Oh, don't you fear! His wife's not going to escape unscathed from this! Nor his friends! Nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is his!

ADAM. Won't they, you scab, you muckworm, you inkblot! Why then, I'll cast myself and them and her and everything I have into this burning fiery furnace! If we char to ashes!

TRIO. We—will—not . . . .

ADAM. Listen, do you hear me! Last night, it was only punched heads and bleeding noses. If I begin this time. . . .

And he snatches up the sledge hammer. They scuttle behind the wheelbarrow, each arming himself with a brick.

TRIO. Don't you come near us!

DANK. This is nothing more nor less than intimidation!

SNARK (*top-noting it*). It is sabotage or something!

JONES (*abysmally*). It is the reign of terror!

NAOMI *turns round, her eyes gleaming.*

DANK. Let me tell you sir, there's a law for blacksmiths that go swinging hammers in people's faces!

SNARK. He's no blacksmith! He's a street orator in disguise. But I'll unmask him!

JONES. He's not even a harmonious blacksmith. Ask any member of the MacDabble Club down there.

SNARK. I don't see anything so wonderful in his work. Tubal-Cain, now! There *was* a blacksmith for you! But he's dead.

JONES. Blacksmith, indeed! I'm in the ironmongery. I think I ought to know a blacksmith!

ADAM (*with blasting scorn*). Ironmongery!

SNARK. Gag him, somebody! He's beginning again.

JONES. What do you think of a blacksmith hammering spires from drain-pipes?

TRIO. Grrr! . . . .

JONES. What do you think of a blacksmith beating plows from sword-blades, and rattling them in our ears like dreadnoughts?

ADAM. Don't you blaspheme my children, ironmonger!

JONES. *You*, a blacksmith! You don't know your own trade! You'll never get a pat on the back for ironwork! You can't make things!

TRIO. He can't! He can't! The blacksmith that can't make things! He can't make things!

> ADAM *brings the sledge hammer thundering down upon the anvil*, NAOMI *at the same time crying aloud for wild joy. Little Boswell nearly jumps out of its skin.*

ADAM. Leave your clatter! . . . .

Now, *I'm* speaking, do you hear? And when I say I'm speaking, you know who I mean. If you don't by now, it's time you did.

You're a liar, ironmonger! So are you all! I can make things! . . . . What man is there here, as 'll dare to stand up now, alone—so as to be seen, so as to be heard, so as to be known for a swine all the rest of his days—and say out loud, again, as I can't make things? . . . .

> *The Sunday School clock drones the quarter. He waits for every echo to die away.*

That sound out yonder reminds me you are liars.

> *And he waits again for silence.*

I hear another, as tells me I can make things.

SNARK *waits this time; but wriggles.*

SNARK. This rhetorical claptrap won't go down with me. It's too much in my own line. I know the trick of it.

JONES. What was he hinting at? I heard nothing.

SNARK. Oh, just one of his double meanings. That's what he does—symbolizes to conceal the atrocity of his real intention.

JONES. Did you hear anything, Dank?

DANK. Not so much as a tick.

ADAM. That's because you none of you know what's going on behind you.

They all whirl round like dervishes.

JONES. I see nothing. Do you, Dank?

DANK (*wiping his pince-nez*). Not a speck.

ADAM. Why, what's yonder, staring you in the eyes?

DANK. What?

JONES. Where?

ADAM. There!

SNARK. Come, out with it! Don't keep playing the kipper with us like this.

ADAM. Well, of all the blinking bats I ever . . . .

And crossing to the inner workshop, he bangs at the door with his fist.

What the thunder do you call this?

Trio. A door.

Adam (*waggling the chain*). And this?

Trio. A chain.

Adam. This?

Trio. Padlock.

Adam. I should think so! What's the use of Sunday School, if they don't learn you your catechism better? . . . .
Now come and stick your ears agen it.

Dank. Stick ears! What for?

Adam. What do you usually stick ears for? To listen, you chump. Now, don't keep me waiting all day.

Snark. If you think I'm going to make a limpet of myself up against your door of doom, you're jolly well mistaken.

Adam. Wise again, Sammy! What's going on in there is enough to make you kiss your pen and perish!

Dank. My word! What can that be?

Adam. Something as lives by law.

Dank. Law! Perhaps then, professionally, I'm the fittest person to . . . .

He goes and glues his ear to the door.

Adam (*mysteriously*). Well? . . . .

Dank. Some kind of mechanism, that's all. Buzzing and going plunk, plunk, plunk! . . . .
Rather—irregular, isn't it?

Adam. No, that's you. Listen again. . . . .
Don't that tell you anything?

DANK. Not a word to me.

JONES. Mechanism? Here, let me come.

SNARK'S *molluscan simile is admirable.*

A most unusual noise. What the MacDabble Club might report upon as—piffling. I don't like it.

ADAM. Oh, you will, Jeremiah, when it pays. They will, when the label's on.

He beckons SNARK *invitingly:*

Now Sammy!

SNARK. Not me. I'm not going to play the goat in your little seances.

And he squats down on a brick. Which topples.

JONES. Well, tell us what it is.

ADAM. Something as come from God through me.

They retire hastily from the door.

Ay, terrifying, isn't it? Not ironmongery, Jeremiah: nothing for you to monkey with. Your law don't touch it, Nathaniel Dank: it's one of its own, set up in the stars. As for you, Sammy Snark, if you were once to understand this child of mine, now coming to birth . . . .

SNARK. Well, I'm not here to understand, see! I'm here to criticize.

ADAM. You'll never manage it, Sammy. I've done you in the eye this time. Oh, it isn't no joke. I've made you something terrible.

SNARK. Yes, most of your things are.

Adam. Right again, Sammy! When once yon living spirit leaves this forge, it will inherit the earth! Oh, I know! God don't whisper in my ears for nothing. Inheritance! That's what it's singing to itself in yonder. Look out for your idols in that day, Little Boswell!

Dank. Yes, I've heard that sort of language before. I know the dogs that use it, too. If you mean, you have in there some infernal contrivance, some machine to . . . .

Adam. I'm no murdering soldier to blow God's images to dust!

Dank. Some of you are! What does your red flag mean —your contemptible red flag?

Adam. What Christ means! Freedom! Brotherhood!

Snark. Yes, we know that brotherhood! Strikes, class-hatred, bomb-shells! Give me Little Boswell, say I!

Adam. Yes, *we* know that brotherhood! The trusts, bank panics, high prices, starvation, sweat shops, white slaveries, ignorance, millionaires, despair! Give me the brotherhood of your broken dogs and harlots rather!

Dank. After all, the law makes no distinctions. We are all brothers under the law.

Jones. We certainly are under the Gospel.

Adam. Then why the devil don't Law and Gospel get up and show it? Instead of talking about it.

Snark. Well, *you* talk!

Adam. I only talk about the things I've done. Live things! You don't call your dead mumblings life, do you? So many dried-up gibbering yesterdays, that's all as comes up out of your wheezy lungs! My child in yonder is the voice that speaks—to-day!

TRIO. Well, tell us what it is!

ADAM. I will! . . . . No, I won't . I'll show you.

> *They trot behind the wheelbarrow, barricading themselves; as* ADAM, *with much ominous rattling of chains and padlock, undoes and opens the door.*
>
> *There issue forth two very obvious musical sounds, alternating regularly.*
>
> ADAM *whispers esoterically:*

Do you hear now?

JONES. It's different, now the door's open. Why, it's almost—musical.

DANK. It won't go off, will it?

ADAM. No, it goes on—forever.

SNARK. Well, music's nothing to me: can't tell one note from another. That's why I hate having to write about it.

DANK. Yes, there *is* a sort of regularity about it, danged if there isn't!

JONES. And it certainly is tuneful. It might just catch the public . . . .
I'd like to look into it.

SNARK. You know, if you fellows are going over in a bunch like that, you'll be making me compromise!

ADAM. That's the trouble with the truth. It pulls so many liars over half-way.

SNARK. Don't you fret! I'll have to see before I believe. What's the use compromising, if the wind veers again before you've raked in? You have to look out for things like that when you're molding public opinion.

ADAM. Perhaps you'd like to peep first. It's good for you to be ahead of the times.

SNARK. Well, seeing's believing. Mind you, if I find . . . .

Halfway to the door, he stops.

You're certain everything's—all right?

ADAM. *Yon* is; but I expect you'll jump a bit.

SNARK. My Lord, we're used to jumps, with you!
Well, here goes! . . . .

He recommences his journey gingerly.

ADAM. Stop: I've a plan. I'll prove you beforehand. All of you whip out your watches.

TRIO. Watches! What for?

ADAM. What d'you suppose? Catch butterflies? . . . . Come, come now! . . . .

And they obey like marionettes.

That's better! . . . .
Now stick your eyes agen them. Ready?

TRIO. Ready.

ADAM. Now, I'll show you something. The moment I holler *Rats*, you'll all be pointing to twenty-five minutes past five. Are you all ready?

TRIO. Yes.

Dank. Just one moment! . . . .

He puts his watch to his ear, winds it, rattles it, and stands at attention with the others.

Snark. Ass!

Adam. Now! Five twenty-five, remember! . . . .

He peers into the darkness of the workshop, holding silence with his hand. There is a long pause, filled only by a crescendo of the measured music within.

Rats!

Snark. By George, he's right!

Jones. Who'd have thought it?

Dank. Incredible!

Adam (*eagerly*). Wasn't I right? Five twenty-five, eh?

Jones. By everyone of us.

Adam. You're sure of that?

Trio. Sure.

Adam. Take your oath?

Trio. Solemn affidavit!

Adam (*rapturously*). Well, you're all burning liars! It was five thirty-one.

They seem unable to share his joy.

Trio. Impossible!

Snark. Why, I put mine right, down the road, just now.

Dank. So did I.

JONES. Me, too.

ADAM (*delightedly*). But you're wrong. Six whole minutes! Three hundred and sixty golden seconds gone to pot!

DANK. We can't all be wrong together! Why, we all say the same thing!

ADAM. It's no use, I'll die! Damn it, can't you see how funny you are?

SNARK. Listen, you cachinnating jackass! Can't you grasp the first principles of communal solidarity? It *was* five twenty-five. Little Boswell time.

ADAM. Well, of course, if you take Little Boswell for the hub of the great cart-wheel! . . . .

JONES. Well, isn't it? Why, empires are made in our pattern!

ADAM. Lord, listen to them! Look down on them! Don't they take the biscuit?

He is of course addressing his God.

SNARK. What do you think Little Boswell's for, but to keep time for the rest of the world? Let me tell you, what Little Boswell thinks today, they'll all think to-morrow—or be pulverized! It's what we mean! It's our destiny! It's what our gunboats mean!

DANK. It's the meaning of our law, our religion, our institutions! Above all, it's the meaning of that sacred symbol, our flag!

SNARK. Superior to all other flags!

JONES. Our flag! Heaven's pet flag!

TRIO. The flag of Little Boswell!

They all three take off their hats.

ADAM *clambers up into the skies with glee.*

ADAM. Ha-ha-ha! Five thirty-one by everlasting God, the stars, and all the powers of heaven, and Little Boswell calls it twenty-five!

JONES. Sacrilegious dog! What right have you to fix God's time?

ADAM. The right of a Fellow Workman! Look in yonder! That's what right!

They scamper to the inner workshop, like a drove of vermin.

TRIO. What is it?

JONES. Why, it's only . . . .

TRIO. A clock!

ADAM. God's clock! The clock I made!

SNARK. Do you mean to tell me, we've been wasting all this time over nothing but a damned clock?

ADAM. Ay, with bells to it! There's nothing silent about my clock. It's like me! All hell can't stifle it!

Now do you get my meaning? Now do you understand this forge and me, and yon glad child of thunder?

SNARK. By all the devils clamoring for copy, yes, I do!

ADAM. Well then, now I've clapped your puppet heads together, get out of my road, Little Boswell! Big Boswell is waiting for its iron!

DANK. You'll have to pay for this, before long. I tell you, the law . . . .

JONES. You'll have to pay hereafter. I tell you, the Gospel . . . .

ADAM. Ay, handcuffs and hell! Little Boswell's bogies!

SNARK. Do you know what you are? Simply—funny! *I* don't think you clever! You're only a joke, a loud-lunged, mealy-mouthed, improper, mangy, shaggy-headed joke! I can't say more. But I will! You wait till tomorrow morning! I'll smash you for this, my man! Red's your color, is it? Well, I'll shew you what yellow signifies! My God, I'll smash you to a pulp!

ADAM. Smash and be damned to you! *My* God, and all the morrows of everlasting are at the back of me!

SNARK. I'll write it up at once. I'll go now. No need to hear the end of this, to write it up!

He grovels on the ground, snouting up scraps of notebook; and rushes out, squealing, scribbling, blasphemous with unclean devils: upon his brow, the brand of all the stinking beasts of Gadara forever.

DANK. As for me, I'll go and look for the policeman.

He does so. JEREMIAH, *about to follow, turns for a word.* ADAM *forestalls him.*

ADAM. No need to tell what you'll do, Jerry! You'll get out cheap imitations of what's in yonder, and sell 'em for God's Timepieces.

JONES. That's an idea.

He modulates in the beautiful diapason of an ironmonger. And passes.

ADAM *shuts the workshop door. He leans against it, breathing heavily.*

ADAM. Well, I've done it. There goes my bread and butter! Beer, too! I've lost them, everyone! The Constituted Sons, the Sunday School, and the whole half dozen MacDabblers and all!

He goes to the wheelbarrow, and sits down disconsolately.

God, how alone I am! Well, it's worth it!

NAOMI. Alone?

She comes and stands by his side.

ADAM. I had forgotten you. Where have you been?

NAOMI. Behind you. Watching for the idol-dust to settle.

ADAM. What comes next?

NAOMI. More idols. And then—the building!

ADAM. What am I, one man alone?

NAOMI. One man.

ADAM. And you? . . . .

There is a shadow in the Dutch doorway. It is JAKE.

JAKE. One moment. I have a word to say here.

ADAM *turns.* NAOMI'S *eyes grow big with apprehension.*

ADAM. Who are you? What's your business here?

JAKE. Ask my mate.

He points at NAOMI. *The day darkens.*

The Sunday School clock drones the half-hour.

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Third Act.

THE FOURTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. The day is overcast with clouds of blood and bronze. JAKE *is still in the doorway.* NAOMI *stands to the right of the anvil;* ADAM, *left of the wheelbarrow.*

NAOMI. I thought you were—dead.

JAKE. So did I. Maybe I am. That's what I come to see.

ADAM. I don't follow you. Come to see what?

JAKE. If I'm dead.

ADAM. How do you hope to find out a thing like that, here?

JAKE. By my fangs. Do you know what they call me? Bloodhound. And I am. And I come to kennel in this smithy.

NAOMI. This is no smithy of the dead. It's where they forge living things.

JAKE. Ay, so you said last time—when I found you huddled in the church. You said it, time afore that; and afore, many times. Then I come; and there was nothing but dead bones rattling.

ADAM. How did you get here?

JAKE. Same road as her; but in the dark. By scent.

NAOMI. I thought it was past all finding out, yon twisted way!

JAKE. I found it. I been following you ever since the hour I died. You remember that hour? . . . .

Naomi. I can see you now—your white face grinning up at the moon like a dog's.

Jake. You was swift, I don't deny it. I allus found you easy quarry afore. This time, you was like the wind. You cost me summat, this time, following you. Somehow, the dead don't slip along so lithe as the living.

Cunning as a vixen, you was—the ways you took. You knowed I favored the swampy valleys, and the tall fat weeds of the winding rivers: you took the bleak moors and the open places, up where the wind blowed wide and lost among the clouds. But the breath of you come down to me in the mud-flats, and my dead nostrils quivered. And I followed.

When you come to the towns, you knowed I loved the lurking alleys, and the dark backways of houses: you took the marketplaces, and went out open, flaunting among the folk. But the flame of you left a trail behind, like a star shooting. And my dead eyes kindled. And I followed.

Once I nearly touched you. Remember that day, and the half-blind shepherd whose hut you helped him build, and him thankless, piping on a wood whistle? Remember that rattle of stones behind you in the gully? It was me, falling. I was close upon you. Then the piping begun. And I was on'y a corpse.

Last of all, I come by your warm nest up in yon bracken, early this morning. I knowed the scent of your body, I seen the shape—the coil of it, like a wild doe's in the sweet fern there. I snuffed out *his* litter. Hard by yours, it was—a ditch and hedge between. Then I begun shifting my eyes, and I seen him! Tramping down the moorside. I watched; and there was summat stealing after him—soft—like a shadow, like a vapor, like a flicker of dew-fire in the dawn. It was you. And you followed him through this door.

Then I knowed what you was about; and I dragged my rotting carcass after you. I been buried among them hollyhock yonder all the morning. I know everything you said and done. Your words come bumbling down to me among the worms.

Now you know how I come. By my nose mostly. Out of the black night. Out of the moldering sod. If I'm not alive, then I'm the wraith of a bloodhound! And I'm in this smithy.

And he enters and stands between them.

ADAM. You're here by no leave of mine.

JAKE. Dead men go where they will, without no leave.

ADAM. Why do you keep on calling yourself dead?

JAKE. She knows.

NAOMI. He was dead. I seen his eyeballs glaze. I heard him rattle.

JAKE. You left too soon. There's allus some life fluttering when you leave too soon.

NAOMI. It was to the heart. I seen it quiver there.

JAKE. I got no heart.

NAOMI. Then the poison-bag inside you.

JAKE. There was a bone, here: betwixt that bag—and you.

ADAM. What's that you're hinting? Do you mean . . . .

JAKE. Bloody murder: that's what I mean. What do you say to that now? . . . .

On'y—I come back again. That's my way too. We don't die so easy, her and me.

And he eyes NAOMI *narrowly.*

NAOMI (*fiercely*). What right, you coming back again? What right, corpses cumbering the earth, when once they'm laid?

JAKE. Wolf's right! The right of brute upon his mate!

NAOMI. I am no mate of yours.

JAKE. Then right of gender-wolf, whose whelps you borne!

NAOMI. I bore no living thing to you. What living thing was ever borne of hate?

JAKE. Then blood-wolf's right upon a brood of bastards!

NAOMI. Ay, call them bastards! They were none of yours. I bore them alone, I—I myself, among the mountains.

JAKE. I lured them down to me in the dank valleys.

NAOMI. They were the sons of heaven. I cradled them in the skies.

JAKE. They died unsuckled on the earth.

NAOMI. They were the falling of new stars upon the world.

JAKE. I douted them.

NAOMI. My firstborn! He was like the twilight! There was the promise of peace in his eyes. He went among the wild things, taming them.

JAKE. He met a wildness bigger than he knowed. It tore him in the forest.

NAOMI. His brother come like noonday—a child of joy. He leapt among the hills. He sang.

JAKE. An adder lurking in the river reeds mistook him for a woodthrush, and he sang no more.

NAOMI. My third—that child of sorrow . . . .
I can see him now, his arms outstretched, a little broken sacrifice . . . .
He was God's daybreak! His love touched everybody. He filled the world with it! . . . .

JAKE. I dragged him down alongside me, a thing of shattered dreams, and trampled him!

NAOMI (*passionately*). Where have you lain him?

JAKE (*savagely*). In the ditchside, rotting!

NAOMI *darts to the other side of* ADAM.

NAOMI. Strangle him!

ADAM. And that I will! . . . .

He rushes at JAKE; *but the latter snatches up the sledge hammer.*

JAKE. Hold off you, blacksmith! You'm not the first God's bastard I done dealings with. There's more your breed than Little Boswell breed in me. Do you want to know what I am? Hell's bastard! Not the sort as makes things. The sort as breaks. I stand for freedom too!

NAOMI. Ay, bloodhound freedom! The freedom as breathes the air of death.

JAKE. That'll be his breathing too, afore I done with him.

NAOMI. Not while he bears in his heart his living child.

JAKE. His heart? I crept in there myself a while ago.

ADAM *puts his hand to his breast, involuntarily.*

Ay, don't you know as dead men walk through hearts as open doors?

ADAM. Ha! The doors of my heart are closed and locked agen the likes of you.

JAKE. I'm the ice-blast: I go whistling through cracks and keyholes. Look inside you, now.

ADAM (*gasping*). Well—I'm looking! . . . .

JAKE. There where the blood festers, and the scarlet mists are rising. Oh, it ain't all living children inside of you. There's more than clocks and plowshares kindling in your heart!—Ay, more than golden gates and marble builded cities! There's me! There's hate! Now do you know me?

ADAM *gives a great cry of anguish.*

So! I'm not dead!

ADAM. Get out! Get out of this forge!

JAKE. Not till I done my deed in it!

And he lets the hammer fall heavily upon the anvil.

ADAM. Oh, I am lost in darkness!

NAOMI. Look up! Yonder! Big Boswell's waiting on the hilltop!

JAKE. Look down. Little Boswell's waiting, too!

NAOMI. Your child! Unborn! It has never cried!

JAKE. It lacks the mothering of Little Boswell!

ADAM. God! What can I do?

JAKE. Do! You ask what do? And around you the swinging hammers and the roaring of great forges ready! Ha-ha-ha! God's blacksmith, God's bastard blacksmith, metal in his hand!—And he don't know what to do, when Little Boswell spits upon him!

ADAM. I do what I must do. I have only learned to make things.

JAKE. Ay, jangle your chains—slave!

ADAM *leaps upon him; but he is quelled by one clutch of those fleshless fingers at his throat.*

Nay, not with kings!

ADAM. Kings! . . . .

And he reels back, stunned.

JAKE. Kings, I said.

ADAM (*stupefied*). Why, what would kings do?

JAKE. I'll tell you what I'd do. If Little Boswell dealt with me as Little Boswell dealt with you: dead as I am, this arm of mine should rise out of the rot and slumber; and forging burning bolts of iron, I'd smash them all to hell! That's if *I* was a blacksmith! That's if *I* had Little Boswell in the hollow of my hand. I'd show them what I meant by freedom! Now you know the sort of bastard I am.

ADAM *stands agonizing for a moment.*

ADAM. But my child! The thing I made for them with my own hands!

JAKE. Ay, they shown their cherishing of that!

ADAM. Maybe, their children; or their children's children . . . . someday . . . .

JAKE. Little Boswell breed don't die out!

ADAM. But it's alive! One of God's own images! Someday they must see. This isn't no dead idol as I've put together.

JAKE. They'll make it one, if it lasts long enough.

ADAM. Maybe, some blacksmith, some man like me, centuries to come . . . . Someone to get up and tell them . . . .

JAKE. Ay, they'll learn him!

ADAM. It can't be! Not this! This as I've made! Why, I've carried it inside me, like a mother.

JAKE. There's been other mothers known their labor come to naught.

ADAM. There's my love upon it. My own blood pours through it. I've been past death and agonies of hell for yon. It must live!

JAKE. What! For Little Boswell to keep time by?

ADAM. It will tell them the truth!

JAKE. For them to turn to lies!

ADAM. What are you urging me? What do you want me to do?

JAKE. Pay back Little Boswell! Blot them out. Leave them wrecked in blindness!

ADAM. How can I? . . . .

JAKE. Yon child of yourn . . . .

ADAM. Well? . . . .

JAKE. It's struggling! It's nearly born! . . . .

ADAM. Well? . . . .

JAKE. One little hour, and it will be free!

ADAM. Well? . . . .

JAKE. Tear it to pieces!

ADAM. Tear my . . . .

The Sunday School clock drones the three-quarters. The reminder stirs like poison in the heart of ADAM. *He rushes to the imaginary window, lifting clenched fists toward the sound. For a moment,* JAKE *possesses him utterly.*

Adulterous liars! Devil worshippers! Blasphemers!

NAOMI. Don't listen to him! Stop your ears! You'm lost, if you listen to him! Lost, like all the others.

She now stands separating them.

ADAM (*dazed*). Others! What others? . . . .

JAKE. *Her* others. You'm not the first. I'm first. But there was others had hankerings after her, afore you come —many of them. You'm on'y the last, as stands betwixt my mate and me.

ADAM. Well, what became of them?

JAKE. They'm gone. Blown to the winds like road dust. Like the scatterings of chaff. They and their bastards with them.

ADAM. What were they to her? Them others?

JAKE. She bore them what they brought to bear.

ADAM. She? . . . .

JAKE. Ay, my mate.

> ADAM *looks at him searchingly. Then at* NAOMI. *He is laboring with some growing remembrance in his mind.*

ADAM. That's what it meant then! Down in them Roman lead mines. Ay, and afterwards, up on the good green earth. And yet again, last night, on the moor! . . . .

And now I know you, who you are. We've met before, you and me, time and time again, down the years; and each time you worsted me. A shadow, that's what I thought it was, darkening men's minds, dealing out death and bloodshed, turning living deeds to idols. It was you!

JAKE. Ah! . . . .

ADAM. Others, were there? Others as knew her before I come! Hell's bloodhound! Black bastard, as I've wrestled with in all my hundred lives! There were no others! There was only one! And it was me!

JAKE. So be it! Wipe away them others! There's still left you and me.

ADAM. That's so! And by Christ's glory, I'm alive!

JAKE. So were you afore. Until you meddled with my mate.

ADAM. Your mate, is she? She! This wild thing of the skies and watching stars, your mate! Not while the blood of yonder hill goes burning through my veins! I'll tear her from you, and make her mine!

JAKE. How—yours?

ADAM. Mine for mating! Mine to breed by! Mine for the peopling of a new world—of living children. Now you know the sort of bastard I am!

They pause, looking at each other across NAOMI.

JAKE. So then, once again! . . . .
You understand, blacksmith? This is death grip betwixt you and me.

ADAM. I've passed this way before—in blinding darkness. This time, I come with flames.

JAKE. The fight's for her, mind you. My mate.

ADAM. For her, that's true! But mine!

NAOMI. One moment. Look into my eyes, you, blacksmith. What do you see written there?

ADAM. I see a kind of wildness. Like a moor bird, nestless.

NAOMI. Why then, yours? What if I'm still my own?

ADAM. I'll make you mine.

NAOMI. You? . . . .

ADAM. Ay, for my mate.

NAOMI. You? . . . .

ADAM. I'll go along with you, into your wild places. Wandering now here, now there, under the open sky.

NAOMI. Ay, like the wind.

Something in her tone makes him pause.

ADAM. Why, what do you ask?

NAOMI. I ask a resting-place. Somewhere sure to abide in.

ADAM. I'll build one for you. Far away! Up on the bleak moors, you and me alone.

NAOMI. You? . . . .

ADAM. Ay, me. I said me.

NAOMI. What *are* you?

He is dumb.

I am a queen. What are *you?*

He lowers his head.

And I mate with none but kings.

He lifts his head with sudden passion.

ADAM. Not with *yon* king!

NAOMI *turns a long look upon* JAKE.

NAOMI (*calmly*). Nay, not with yon king.

JAKE. All the same, she's none of yourn—slave! There'll be no slave's bastards peopling the world by her! No slave's drab, she! A queen!

ADAM (*slowly*). Ay, the word goes home! It's what I am. A slave!

But his eyes are kindling with some new big birth of thought.

JAKE. And I'm a king! If not hers, at least fit mate for her! Now, where's your boasting, blacksmith?

ADAM. I'm trying to frame it right. A slave can't fashion boasts so swift as kings. It's my dull wit, the mud I'm made of! Ay, the dirt, the strangling clods out of which I come! That and the galling chains!

JAKE. Ay, clank them! Let them bite well into the fierce flesh!

ADAM. Ay, they bite deep enough!

JAKE. And the ancient rust of them! Like canker, festering!

ADAM. Ah! Slave! Slave, am I? . . . .

NAOMI. Look, they'm breaking! The iron pulls like plaited straw! The links are severing, one by one!

JAKE. Ay, but the blood gushing! Slave's blood! No blood of kings to breed by!

ADAM. Ay, no blood of kings! No royal poison creeping through the veins, to turn my heart to stone! But the blood from the lead mines yonder: the blood as toiled and suffered and bore up metal out of the deep hills: the blood as foamed with a thousand dreams and doings, taming the earth and the wildness of it! *My* blood! Blacksmith's blood! The blood of a slave! And as a slave, I claim her! Queen or no queen, she shall breed by what I am!

NAOMI (*exultantly*). Ay, but you don't know what you are!

JAKE. And never shall, so long as this dead hand of mine . . . .

NAOMI. Ay, but by the golden sun, he shall!

ADAM. A slave, I am! No more freedom! Look, I cast it from me! Henceforward, I wear new chains! Not Little Boswell's! My own! Of my own making!

JAKE. Then all your talk of freedom . . . .

ADAM. I am her slave no longer! She is mine, to deal with as I will.

JAKE. Where shall you deal with her? Far away: up on the bleak moors, you and her alone?

ADAM. Not so. Down here. In the thick and the bustle of it. In Little Boswell.

JAKE. Ha! Little Boswell will have a word to say to that.

ADAM. They will have no word. It's my word only, now.

JAKE. Ay, and win yourself the Little Boswell hate, as knows no peace.

ADAM. I am past their hate. There's none of them can hurt my heart any longer. *This* is peace.

JAKE. Well, you've paid for it.

ADAM. I have paid.

JAKE. There is yet more payment to come.

ADAM. I am rich. I will meet it.

JAKE. Last night's jubilee won't be in it, with the fun ahead of you.

ADAM. The fun ahead of me belongs to God.

JAKE. It's Little Boswell's part in it I'm thinking of.

ADAM. Little Boswell! I have a way to beggar them forever.

JAKE. I'd like to hear it.

ADAM. It's a slave's job, too! Ladders and cranes and great wheelbarrows! Marble blocks and gleaming golden bars! Ay, and mortar! And a deal of iron! And only me as can do it!

JAKE. What?

ADAM. Build their city.

He points up, through the imaginary window.

JAKE. Ay, a barren city! A city of dreams! A city with none to live in it.

ADAM. Then, like God, I'll make them.

JAKE (*savagely*). Then you'll make them bastards, by a wanton!

ADAM. Ay, by one in scarlet.

JAKE *turns to* NAOMI.

JAKE. Do you hear this, you? Have you no answer, when this slave outfaces you?

NAOMI. There is no answer. I'm my own no longer.

JAKE. What, you, the queen as on'y mates with kings!

NAOMI. I have found one.

ADAM (*wonderingly*). Found—who?

NAOMI. The king I watched for.

They are apart, gazing at one another.
JAKE *has been standing all this time, rigid, motionless, grasping the handle of the hammer, as when first it fell upon the anvil. He now lets it drop. It clatters from his nerveless fingers to the ground.*

JAKE. So! . . . . It was death.

They pay no heed to him. Their eyes are bent upon each other.

Maybe, some lingering spark . . . . Some mummied bone, unwithering . . . .

> NAOMI *and* ADAM *are wandering, high up on the moor.*

NAOMI. I waited through the long night, watching!

ADAM. I lay in darkness, and I never knew.

NAOMI. I come like a wild thing to the lair of you; and nestled there.

ADAM. I dreamed of stars, and woke again and lost you.

NAOMI. I come in the morning before the break of dawn.

ADAM. And the dawn broke; and it's—Today!

JAKE. Harkee to this voice, you two. It's from the grave. I am gone from you. But beware! One slip, one halting step hereafter; and I am back again. My sort don't fall and rot away to dust and vapor, evermore! . . . .

> *His voice is like a far-off stirring of wind among dry leaves, down in the valleys. They have never heard him.*

ADAM. Today, and the good sweat and toil of it!

NAOMI. And beyond today—Tomorrow!

> *The sun bursts through the clouds and falls upon them.* JAKE *watches for a moment, his eyelids faltering; and he slips noiselessly away.*
>
> *The Sunday School clock drones six.*
>
> *If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Fourth Act.*

THE FIFTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. The day is golden with sunlight. NAOMI *and* ADAM *are alone in the forge.*

ADAM. And now for the real jubilee to begin. I needn't wait for tomorrow morning. There's plenty for me to go on with, out there, just now.

A sound comes back at him, through the imaginary window.

There! Do you hear them?

NAOMI. Ay, they're beginning to wake up. Some on 'em have been wriggling since cock-crow.

ADAM. Well, I'm ready for them. I'm ready for the worst as Little Boswell's heart can offer me.

NAOMI. What if it's the best?

ADAM. How best?

NAOMI. Why, what if it's Big Boswell's heart you hear awaking yonder?

ADAM. God! I'm ready for that, too!

NAOMI. Believe it! Don't you hear the sound of it thickening through the air?

ADAM. I—don't—know! I've told these people things before. Many times. Why, it was me, six years ago, as called them here, and told them of the brotherhood of man.

NAOMI. Well, didn't they listen to you, that time?

Adam. Ay, at first, while I was new to them. Then they turned again to idols; and twisted my plain meaning into tracts for Sunday School. I up and spoke again, and told them of the lies and hate they lived by. Showed them the death and bitterness of it!—Well, they soon let me know about that. I preached their own God's gospel to them, and brought Christ's Murder to their blood-stained doors. They spat upon me. I told them of the lusts as fed their brothels; and every red-eyed wolf among them said I lied. Even when they didn't speak, I knew the meaning of their leering silence. This time, it's freedom—the thing they're always bragging of; and as long as I'm in the world, they'll have it dinned into their heads, as freedom isn't all a matter of flags and soldiers' pop-guns. It's something they've got to sweat for. Don't you think they're going to get off easy, once I see them stuck in front of me!

Oh, I make them laugh, all right. They want to be amused. Lot of jaded johnnies! Everyone of them thinking I mean his next-door neighbor; and I mean just him!

Naomi. And what about yourself?

He turns upon her with delighted surprise.

Adam. Now, you're the first person as ever had the gumption to tax me that way. Why, you might be my wife! . . . .

Oh, but you're right, all right. A man don't carry on the style I do, unless he felt the bite of all these things inside himself. Mind you, I wouldn't have *them* know that! . . . .

All the same, I'm different. Mine's the case of the repentant sinner, if I do seem to say: "Thank God, I'm not as other men!" Oh, I'm religious, right enough! Even Snark squeaks that about me. Calls me "Reverend!"

NAOMI. You're talking about yourself a long time, master?

ADAM. Well, haven't I the right to talk about myself? Look what I've done! I'd like to see any of them out there get up and dare to do what I've been doing here to-day. They'd soon learn about it! *You* ought to know better than anybody! Why, woman—and mind you, I'm dead in earnest now—it's been you, watching over me, caring for me, suffering with me, while these putrid curs kicked up their mud at me, as made me the mighty thing I am! Oh, you know! And I know too! Do you think I mind the hatred of the whole blind world of them, so long as I have you?

NAOMI. You have me, beyond this whole blind world.

ADAM. What does Little Boswell know of the things as you and me know? They can't begin to dream!

NAOMI. Ay, it isn't easy, holding up high banners in the air!

ADAM. We have wrought together, you and me, deep down in the earth! In the unknown! In the hidden places!

NAOMI. We have torn God's secrets from the clouded heavens!

ADAM. We have builded! We have put together! We have borne living children!

NAOMI. And when the world has flouted us, we have poured upon them untold riches!

ADAM. They do not know the weeping and the labor!

NAOMI. They do not know the laughter and the sweetness!

Adam. The sorrows of it!

Naomi. The glories of it!

Adam. The downfalls!

Naomi. The upliftings! The flames of the sky are burning, and they do not see them!

Adam. The winds of the earth are singing, and they never hear them!

Naomi. But they shall! The day is coming! It is come!

Adam. Nay, not for them! Not Little Boswell! Their eyes are bound: their ears are stopped with clay!

Naomi. Nay, but Big Boswell! They shall wake, and be alive, and understand forever! . . . .

Hark! I can hear them now!

She rushes to the imaginary window:

Look! They are awake! They are up and buzzing!

Adam. Where? . . . .

And he joins her at the window.

Naomi. Out yonder! They are gathered in the open place below there!

Adam. Why, it's swarming with them! There must be hundreds!

Naomi. Ay, and beyond them, thousands trailing along the valley!

Adam. Look! Their eyes are bent this way! It's about me! See! They're bound for the forge. Well, I'm ready for them!

He seizes the sledge hammer.

Naomi. Speak to them, through the window!

Adam. What shall I tell them?

Naomi. Tell them what you've always told them. Tell them the truth.

Adam. God help me now, I will!

And the imaginary window is flung as it were wide upon. Adam *addresses the crowd outside:*

Well, I'm here. In the same old place. Doing the same old job. Forging iron for you. You needn't look for tin nor paste nor putty in this smithy! Iron! That's my trade. That's why I'm here. And you won't find me skulking away.

What I'd like to know is: What are *you* here for? What are you? Are you Little Boswell come with stones to kill one more of God's high voices? . . . .

Or are you Big Boswell come with guts of living thunder? . . . .

He considers them a moment, without speaking.

Look at me, you! Big Boswell and Little Boswell together. I'm your blacksmith! I'm the man as works for you. And I'll talk about my work first.

I'm the maker of it: not you. And I'll make, my way: the way God shewed me. It's ancient way enough, if you knew the signs. There's nothing novel in my making: it's as old as the hills—and as lasting. But that's our secret only—the Workers as Know How! Not ironmongers! Not penny-a-lines! Not little pups from Sunday School! All the same, it's yours— To enjoy, if you've not forgotten how! It's no longer mine, the moment I got it done. I make for you! What are you going to give me back again? Dirt and swineyard offal? Or my wages?

He pauses to take breath.

And next, I'll talk about myself. Yes, that's been Little Boswell's pet joke, six years now: it's getting stale. That and the blasphemy wheeze. Well, here's a bit of both for you. When I say myself—as I sometimes do—I'm speaking of Someone a long sight bigger than me here. I mean God! Yes, I thought that 'd get some on you! . . . . If you know your Bibles, if you know the meaning of your own religions, Jew or Christian, you'll understand. If you don't, I might be Pope of Rome and Moses on the Mountain all in one, and you'd never tumble. Don't you see I'm trying to save your damned souls? Shewing the bottom truth of what's inside yourselves! When I say Me most, I mean You more! Though I'm jiggered if some of you deserve it! . . . .

He pauses again.

And last of all, I'll tell you of this thing being born today. It's a living child, remember. The labors are all over: no more anguish: another moment, and it will be free. But I see a Shadow waiting for it: something dead and moldering in the earth, rotten, green with envy, yellow with decay, pretending to be alive! Something pledged to strangle it! Something as come here for just that purpose! Rat-like, squeaking! Oh, it's poisonous, powerful—I don't deny it! But I alone—one man alone—this day have dared to grapple with it! People of Big Boswell, I made it for love of you! Shall they strangle it?

The People of Big Boswell answer.

Then I am alone no longer! If it were only ten of us, the city has begun.

Naomi. Hark!

The Sunday School clock drones the quarter.

Adam. What does yon mean now? It's dead and done for!

Naomi. It means my work is over. And I must wander on again.

Adam. What, leave me now?

Naomi. I shall be with you always.

Adam. Where are you going? What are you going to do?

Naomi. To strike the true hour. All over the world.

Adam. Oh, Scarlet Woman! . . . .

Naomi. Blacksmith! . . . . It's been a long journey, you and me together, today, mate.

Adam. Journey? . . . .

Naomi. Ay, a man may move a lot in one short hour, and him never shifting a foot. And that's what you done to-day.

They are widening apart slowly, their eyes fixed on each other.

Adam. I have known you all my days, Scarlet Woman; and now you're mine.

Naomi. You shall know me when the last star is shivered into dust. And I shall be yours, blacksmith.

Adam. Oh, you are fading from me! What are you? Only a dream; or something real?

NAOMI. Nay, I'm real enough, for them as want me!

ADAM. And yet . . . . Why, I've never so much as touched you! You've been here . . . . and there . . . . and moving about like flame, like music; and yet . . . . I've never even kissed you on the lips.

NAOMI. Haven't you? Why, I've borne you, your child. Watch it, blacksmith.

Good luck, mate.

She fastens her eyes upon him for the last time and is gone.

ADAM. My child! It has never cried yet! But it shall! It's coming to life! She shall hear it! It shall echo in her heart and comfort her forever! They shall all hear it! Ay, even Little Boswell, this time! They shall hear it through the world!

He goes to the inner workshop and flings open the door:

Let your lungs free, people of Big Boswell! Not for me! It's not my child, merely! It is the child of God!

He rushes into the workshop. A moment later, there comes crying out of it a great chord of bells. The curtain falls. It is the end of the play.

THE QUINTETTE

(See p. 263)

The following cacophonies, well rendered, it is hoped may prove pleasing to the futurist ear:

SNARK (*1st soprano*). I'll editorialize you for that remark! Yes, I will! I'll make scareheads of you! I'll leave you without a shred of honor to your name! Oh, I'll not be silent about it! I'll be an eagle, and scream you in the sun! . . . .

ELLEN (*2d soprano*). Don't you think you're going to top-note me out of my bad opinion of you! Not if I know it! I can scream as loud as you, and will! You, a man! Why, you're only a bad slate-pencil, squeaking like a whistle!

DANK (*tenore buffo*). This will never do! It is contrary to all tradition! It is not done! Please, please! Gentlemen, please, please, please! . . . .

ADAM (*baritone*). Under the spreading chestnut tree,
The village smithy stands:
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands.

He sings it, accompanying himself on an old tin kettle.

JONES (*basso-profondo*). Is this to be last night's pandemonium all over again, or is it not to be? To be or not to be: that is the question!

They continue ad lib., until DANK *wins out.*

THE RIB OF THE MAN

A PLAY OF THE NEW WORLD SETTING FORTH
IN SIGNIFICANT FORM BY THE AID OF SEVEN
PLAYERS THE STORY OF AN AFTERNOON IN
THE FULNESS OF DAYS

Νῦν δὲ γυναικῶν φῦλον ἀείσατε, ἡδυέπειαι
Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο.
—*Hesiod Theogony 1021*

THE RIB OF THE MAN, written during the year 1916, was first published in book form by Harper and Brothers, New York, in April, 1917. Outside amateur circles, it is still awaiting production on the regular stage.

THE RIB OF THE MAN

The Rib of the Man is a play of the New World, setting forth in Significant Form, by the aid of Seven Players, the Story of an Afternoon in the Fulness of Days.

The Time is from five to half-past seven on an afternoon during the World War.

The Place is the Courtyard of a Villa overlooking the Sea, on an Island of the Aegean. The stonework is marble, square-blocked without ornament and the color of honey. The villa, named Eden, is to the left: the upper story, a loggia with stairway descending to the yard; the lower, yawning into cellarage. On the right are columns, cypress trees, and a glimpse of garden. A terrace, approached by steps and bounded by a low wall, occupies the background. The wall is recessed for a seat. Beyond are cedar branches and a blue sky. A plot of lawn carpets the yard.

Classic Benches stand formally, right and left. In the center, upon a plain modern base, an ancient altar. It is a tripod of Egyptian porphyry, scarred with age, but glowing like a flame of rose. The inscription in Greek uncials below, ΤΗΙ ΤΩΝ ΘΕΩΝ ΜΗΤΡΙ, points to a worship that goes back beyond all Bibles to the foundations of the world.

The Persons represented are David Fleming, an image of God, the man; Rosie Fleming, a help meet for him, the rib; Archie Legge, a gentleman, a beast of the earth; Basil Martin, an aviator, a fowl of the air; Peter Prout, a scientist, the subtle one; Ion, a gardener, the voice walking; and Diana Brand, a sparerib, the flaming sword.

The Song used in the play is Sappho's ποικιλόθρον', ἀθάνατ' 'Αφρόδιτα, sung in Greek to the tune of Brahms's *Sapphische Ode*.

THE FIRST ACT

THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE

In the beginning there is shown an ancient gardener, busy with a besom. He wears a saffron smock, his brown legs bare but sandaled. It is ION. *As he works he croons a song in Greek.*

He breaks off suddenly, diverted by some happening in the garden; and PETER PROUT *crawls in. A queer old party with a flat head, and clad in silver grey.*

PETER *is equipped with entomological tackle and has caught something. He now wriggles pleasantly upon the altar, nipping its thorax.*

PROUT. I get old and stiff as sin. But I still bag beauties. Sss! A fine fat female.

He stabs her neatly with a pin; then, looking up, catches ION'S *eye.*

Krr!

ION. What for, you murder my dear butterfly?

PROUT. My good sir, science! Surely a little bloodshed in the sacred cause of science . . . . Ah!—You don't know who I am. Nobody ever does at first. No matter! *Prout!* I repeat, sir, *Prout! Peter Prout!*

ION. Is it a joke?

PROUT. Joke! I'm introducing myself. Do I strike savagery, where the name of Prout is nothing?

ION. Forgive! It is a foolish island. Here we live thousand of year ago, all day long.

PROUT. This is the penalty of incognito. If I went about, the roaring lion, devouring their indigestible dinners, I'd be welcome as the devil. I come, a simple old soul with a butterfly net, and I'm a joke. Let me tell you, sir, there's more behind this net than—butterflying! It is the symbol of a craft that tangles Life herself. She can't fool me. I know her secret.

ION. I am Greek: I like a secret. Tell me.

And he settles coaxingly at his feet.

PROUT. Sex. The fact may not have pierced your island gloom, but *Prout on Sex* denotes the final word. In that book, I expose all. I investigate amatory impulse from its mild beatitudes in primordial mud to the compositions of Matisse. What do I find? Sex! I find sex in everything, and I do not shrink from saying so. Little of the modest violet about me, sir! I'm biological or nothing.

ION. Ah, now you are talking Greek: I understand. I study life too, here in my garden.

PROUT. Bless my bones! . . . . And I mistook you for an oriental mystic!

He slips down for a hobnob.

ION. Have a bit of fig?

PROUT. Krr! Mine's smoke.

Their rituals occupy them a moment.

ION. You are a wise man. How of a case like so?

You are only the old fool in the garden. You go about, you dig, you plant; but you are like God—you are deaf: so we talk aloud. All the same, your big ear, it is wide open, and one day, down by the Tree We Must Not Pick, you learn—a Secret! Next, you think to help a bit: so you write and tell. And now already, she is back in the villa; and in a jiff, Mrs. Fleming will be here too.

PROUT. I see sex in this already. Proceed.

ION. Your Beautiful Moon, she is upstair, changing herself of the voyage. Not a soul know she is come. Mrs. Fleming, she is down at the Kafenia, turkey-dancing for the Red Cross. It is when they meet, you bad old man, you will find what you have done. Only, it is not *you*. It is *me* all the time, see? So!

PROUT. From your disorganized data, I infer: two females in antagonism. Yes?

ION. *Antagonisma!* They do not meet for three year.

PROUT. Sss! I thought the one bright instinct of my life could not deceive me. Who is the man?

ION. I did not say a man. Do you mean Mr. Fleming? Or one of the others?

PROUT. Others! What!—Polyandry?

ION. Not so very poly. It is only four of us who are men, counting *me*.

PROUT. Ample, sir, for polyandric purposes! I must contrive some way of sticking on here.

ION. That will make five. (*Counting.*) You and me: Captain Martin from the big war: Mr. Legge, who is always come amusing Mrs. Fleming; and . . . . Ah!—Mr. Fleming.

PROUT (*glittering*). Bit of a mole, eh?

ION. What you call *archaiologos*, yes. He goes all day digging for pots and palaces under the ground.

PROUT. The archaeological husband!—Sss! . . . . Now, listen. Can't have everybody meddling in this problem. Polyandry means mine! Don't you get shoving in your oar; and I'll show you how we practice science down—my way.

ION. You will do all this for love of me?

PROUT. Certainly not, sir! My devotion is purely psychoanalytical.

ION. Oh! That is all right then.

He begins moving away.

PROUT. One moment! That Secret, down by the Tree . . . . ?

ION. Ah, that I do not tell, I leave it for your so-clever net to tangle.

PROUT. Krr!

ION, *blithely warbling, pads to the terrace. There he meets* ROSIE FLEMING. *She is a pretty thing in pink with a parasol.*

PROUT'S *angry rattle changes to a pleased hiss.*

ROSIE. Ion, do stop howling. Is Mr. Legge here?

ION. It is a wonderful thing, I have to tell! Already, my Beautiful Moon . . . .

ROSIE (*shooing him down*). I really can't bother listening to one of your long-winded Greek myths this hot afternoon. I'm far too cross. Hasn't *any*body come? Ion! Oh!

For he has resumed his melody. She prods him with her parasol. He rubs the place ruefully and stops.

Deaf old nuisance! . . . .

> *Suddenly her face wreathes in smiles. She has spied the hat of a man. She tiptoes playfully down to the altar:*

Archie Legge, you naughty boy! . . . .

> *Only to find* Prout *basking there.*

I beg your pardon. I mistook you for a friend.

Prout. No mistake, ma'am, I am. Every woman's friend. Professor Prout. Prout of *Prout on Sex.*

Rosie. No really, how charming! Of course, you've come to see the Altar. My husband's excavating, but I'm *Mrs.* Fleming. Pray don't move, if you're cosy. My friend, the one I thought you were, adores that place. Goodness knows why!—It's the hottest spot in the Ægean.

Prout. Thankee, ma'am, I'm like your friend: I adore hot spots. What's the jigamaree?

Rosie. The Altar! My husband's famous discovery! Isn't that why you came?

Prout. Not precisely. I just happened this way, in pursuit of a fine female butterfly. Then too, the delightful associations of the name, "Eden," on the gate-post, naturally. . . . . And here I am.

Rosie. Fancy not knowing David's altar! It's thousands of years old—five or fifty, I never quite remember. The scholars rave over it. It *is* rather jolly, that spot of rich warm color, in the middle of all this chilly marble. Decorative, don't you think? The Greek at the back of your legs will tell you what it's all about, if you read the wiggly stuff. I don't!

PROUT. Greek! I'm afraid my eyes . . . . Moreover, upside down . . . .

ROSIE. Please don't get apoplexy: I've mastered the translation. Lord, I've heard nothing else for three dreary years! "To the Mother of the Gods."

PROUT. Mother! There again! Sss! . . . .

ROSIE. Yes, rather sweet! Think of those benighted pagans having a perfectly ducky idea like that!

PROUT. Yes, ma'am, it's curious how all these outworn anthropomorphic symbols keep on harping . . . .

He is interrupted by ION *squatting on the lawn beside him, to plait bines.*

ION. Now I make a basket for the figs I bring her.

PROUT. Krr! Harping . . . .

ION. Three year! A long time to be without a fig!

ROSIE. Please don't take any notice. It encourages him. We have to endure him, because this is the one decent rentable villa on the island, and it's his. But the restrictions! . . . . There! Even to fruit-trees! Simply, I suppose, because in the first idiocy of my honeymoon, I christened the place "Eden." Selfishness, that's the trouble! Just plain piggish masculine selfishness and lunacy!

PROUT (*sotto voce*). Lunacy! And he led me to suppose he was a biologist!

ROSIE. He's always pretending to be something silly. And you needn't lower your voice. There is that blessing. He's stone deaf.

PROUT. Deaf! . . . .

He turns suspiciously, but Ion *is contemplating hidden things.*

Ion. My Moon, they shall know her by the lovely song of Sappho.

Rosie. There! Everlastingly chattering! See, what was I . . . .

Prout. The altar, ma'am. Its pregnant dedication.

Rosie. Exactly! My husband has written a huge book about it. I haven't read it myself; but it's fearfully clever. I grant, poor dear Papa did actually *find* the altar and, Heaven knows, left papers enough littering the house; but what I always say is, *David wrote the book!* The recognition it has won him, you wouldn't believe! Naturally, I helped. A woman can do so much, don't you think? I don't mean in a horrid public way; but in the home, among friends, everywhere, just quietly pushing, hm? What *is* the good of knowing people, if you can't use them? I'm afraid I'm only very old-fashioned. Oddly enough, David's book is all about that kind of woman. It is called *The Rib.* You don't mind me going on with my knitting, do you?

She fishes it out of her pink bag.

Prout. Talking of ribs, ma'am, strange thing; but on the very first page of *Prout on Sex* . . . .

Rosie. No really, how delightful! We are all making trotty little comforters for the poor fellows at the front. Isn't this war terrible? The royal families, how they must suffer: all related, you know! We have one staying with us now—a soldier, not a royalty—Basil Martin, the aviator. You must have read about him in the papers. Well, after that perfectly thrilling event up in the clouds, he came down here to convalesce. An awfully decent sort and frightfully brave; but just a weeny bit standoffish!—Pity, isn't it? Men are so scarce in this wilderness.

PROUT. Not so very poly! Ah! . . . .

ROSIE. Yes, you're going to scold me for a naughty little flirt, I know! . . . .

She favors him with her pet pout.

Everybody scolds me nowadays! Simply because I like nice men friends, instead of a lot of stuffy women. I don't care! . . . .

Look! Isn't that darling?

She lets her knitting at him, a long limp reptile of uncoiling wools. He takes the end, wraps it round his arm and plays with it as though it were some live thing.

I have a friend, a dear ridiculous old maid who does everything. She started it for me. I'm only in my first row myself; but funny old Tilly did all this! Doesn't it prove what I was saying? Woman can do so much. To help, I mean.

PROUT. You mentioned flirtation. On that point, I . . . .

ROSIE. My idea, absolutely. Ah, if only women would realize the influence they have in their hands already! After all, men merely want managing! But all this unwomanly publicity and unkindness to policemen! Surely, Home does mean something, or whatever was the use of writing the song? Indelicacy, that's the trouble! And I think they ought to be stopped!

PROUT. Touching flirtation, neurosis reveals . . . . Krr!

It is ION *again, with a burst of song.*

Rosie. Ion! Ion! Oh, please poke him in the back with your net!

Which Prout *does.* Ion *rewards him with a face of beaming brotherhood.*

Ion. How do you do? Yes, I am here. I do not put in the oar, once!

Rosie. Please go on. Don't let him keep on rudely interrupting you.

Prout. What I wanted to say was this. You wrong me by supposing I disapprove of what you call—flirtation. Indeed, I claim I may be styled flirtation's paramount apostle! . . . .

She wags a finger at him, signifying "Naughty!"; but he hisses her down.

Yes, madam, a perusal of my book would show my viewpoint is most liberal. I maintain flirtation is a practice sanctioned by every high and hallowed biologic principle. Take now, the example of the female stickleback . . . .

Ion. There is that drat telegram-boy, again at my fig-tree! *Ai!* You Turk, wait till I come hold of you!

And he fusses off into the garden.

Rosie. There, you see! That tree again! Selfish old . . . . So nice, meeting you! You can't imagine how refreshing it is, having a dear old gentleman to talk to, after a pack of tiresome boys.

Prout. Nothing more natural! Indeed, in this very instance of the stickleback . . . .

Rosie. Older men are so much more—more . . . .

PROUT. Unquestionably! When the flamboyant male of that affectionate little fish . . . .

ROSIE. These sudden intimacies! Sometimes I think they mean we may have met before. Perhaps in some other world. Some better world! . . . .

And so you have written a nice naughty old book all about flirtation!

He drops his stickleback at once.

PROUT. Yes, ma'am, yes: in the *larger* sense, yes!

Of course, when we say flirtation, there is flirtation and flirtation. We mean—flirtation.

ROSIE. My way of thinking, exactly! You put it all so clearly!

PROUT. You appreciate clarity?—Ah, you should see my book! There's clarity for you—clarity and naked truth! Madam, you shall see it! I have one here in my knapsack: several! I disseminate them wherever I'm—permitted.

He begins fumbling at the knapsack.

ROSIE. Really, I don't deserve . . . .

PROUT. Madam, you do; but you don't know why. I will tell you why. It is because you are the problem I have been seeking all my life. I have found you down among the spiders, the anthropoids, the Himalayan Kulus; but never before as high as this. Mrs. Fleming, congratulations! Already I behold in you my next experiment. Scientifically you are mine. To express myself with radiant perspicuity: *I know all!*

ROSIE (*weakly*). All! About what?

PROUT. You. The other problem, the problem of the Beautiful Moon up yonder . . . .

He points to the villa. She gapes bewilderedly at the heavens.

. . . . I do not yet profess to fathom. It is you only, courageous female! And I applaud you for it.

Rosie. Then for mercy's sake, you fascinating mysterious old thing, explain.

Prout. I will; and in one word. Hitherto we have employed the empty euphemism, Flirtation. What of—Polyandry?

Rosie. Polly—what?

Prout. *Andry*. Comes from the Greek, *anēr*.

Rosie. Never heard of the place. Nor the lady.

Prout (*scribbling*). There, ma'am, *Prout on Sex*, the fruit of all my knowledge, autographed. It represents the happy labors of a lifetime. Take it, digest it and become wise.

Rosie. How perfectly heavenly of you! I'll . . . .

She skims rapidly through the pages.

I'll put it with David's and my dear Papa's!

Prout. Ah!—Heredity! Who was Papa?

Rosie. Why, you don't seem to know *any*thing about us! Papa was Dr. Brand. Erasmus Brand.

Prout. What, the great Brand? Brand that found the famous phallic . . . .

Rosie. Absolutely!

Prout. So that's where I am! Talk of coincidences!

And of course, you were the young girl! Not a day older, positively! Amazing! . . . . So you *did* marry the man?

Rosie. Whatever are you trying to say?

Prout. Why, I've been here before. Fact! I can recall distinctly every single . . . . No! There wasn't an altar.

Rosie. Then you never saw me! That thing's been stuck there, ever since I came.

Prout. How long ago?

Rosie. Three years.

Prout. Nonsense! My book's older than that!

Rosie. I think I ought to remember the year when David and I were married!

Prout. Very man, I mean. Brand's assistant. Bristly moustache. Fellow with a pickax, always jabbering Greek with you.

Rosie. But I don't know Greek!

Prout. Archaeology, then. Weren't you and he constantly . . . .

Rosie. No!

Prout. Then I'm . . . . No, I'm not! There *was* a girl. And I'll swear Brand said his daughter.

Rosie. That was my sister. And I don't want to talk about her, please!

Prout. Ah! . . . . Just one little point. Her name?

Rosie (*snapping*). Diana!

Prout. The Beautiful Moon! Ah! . . . . Sss! . . . .

Something is happening in the background. A head bobs up. Then a body. It is ARCHIE LEGGE *climbing over the wall.*

LEGGE. Hello, Rosie! Guess what! Such a lark!

ROSIE. Archie, I do think, when there's a gate . . . .

He turns back to chaff someone below.

LEGGE. What about it, dear old chap? Haw! . . . . You know, he's overdoing this wounded warrior game. Bally old newspapers have made him dotty.

ROSIE. Oh, dear! Captain Martin coming?

LEGGE. That's the joke. Too jolly slow for me, limping the long way round with him. Know what I did? Laid five drachmas, me handicapped, you the goal. Silly cuckoo took me, started; and I shinned the wall. That's what I call sport.

He then alights, pulls his tie, and joins ROSIE. *He is pimply, forty, and the latest thing in "summer suitings."*

ROSIE. You're horrid; and I'm angry anyway! Why didn't you turn up at the Kafenia?

LEGGE. I say though, you look spiffing! And no beastly people about. You and me alone, what! . . . .

She restrains his approach, pantomiming frantically.

Where? . . . .

PROUT. Here! She means me.

And he waggles his net over the altar.

LEGGE. The deuce!

Rosie. Yes, my new friend! We only met a moment ago, but it seems ages! Archie Legge: Professor . . . .

She takes a peep at the book.

Prout (*rasping*). Prout!

Legge. Haw!

Prout. Sss!

Rosie. The professor has given me a copy of his enchanting book! Sweet, isn't it?

Legge (*taking it*). Ripping! . . . . I say though, really! Sex, you know!

Prout. I'll slip away quietly!—No, don't insist! Perhaps tonight at your simple family dinner . . . . Meanwhile, don't mind me crawling around your cellarage, eh? Nice and dark! And there's a parasitic male rejoicing in such places, whose polygamous enthusiasms . . . .

And he vanishes in a whistle of sibilants.

Rosie. Ugh! I'm bored stiff! Here have I been making myself utterly killing, thinking that old grub might be somebody; and he's only an author!

Legge. Really though, the bounder, giving you a thing like this! Not even as if he knew you!

He gravitates to the spot he adores, and opens the book.

'Pon my word! Very thing, I've been saying all summer! Haw!

And he plunges into Prout.

Rosie. Well, I do think considering this afternoon, instead of reading that silly book . . . .

LEGGE. Haw! Rotten old rip!

ROSIE. Archie!

LEGGE. Hello, did you speak? I say, Rosie, listen to this. My philosophy to a *t!* . . . . What's up now?

ROSIE. Oh, friends, friends!

LEGGE. What's the matter with friends?

ROSIE. Matter! They're every bit as vile and selfish as —husbands!

LEGGE. Rosie, don't say a frightful thing like that!

ROSIE. Well, why didn't you turn up at the Kafenia, as you promised? You know the only happiness I have in the world is turkey-trotting! Yes, I know it's out of date; but some of us must stand for the beautiful old ideals!

She fiddles about for a handkerchief.

LEGGE. Fact is, little woman . . . .

ROSIE. I did expect my own pals to support me! There I stood like a stuck doll, waiting to score off all those stiff Greek frumps; and the place a hideous vacuum! And it was for charity! Then you, instead of being sorry, sit reading footling books; and *he's* invited himself to dinner! I'm so brokenhearted, I vow I'll never, never trot again!

And she melts into tears.

LEGGE. Come now, that's sheer recklessness! Little girl, be chippy!

But she is comfortless. He makes a bookmark of a blade of grass, then goes to her.

Dear child, do think of me! Only a man! Woman weeping, don't you know! Gets me here!

He blinks and tugs at his collar.

Haw! Baby . . . .

Rosie. I hate you! Go away!

He does; and sits, a little huffed.

Legge. That's what one gets! If you knew what I'd gone through today!—Troubles, my Lord! And there's a bit here I wanted to read you about turkeys: only, of course, now . . . . Enough to make a fellow do something desperate! Put an end to it all!

Rosie (*roused*). Archie, you would never dare!

Legge. Don't know! Thought of it only this morning. Shaving!

The horror fascinates her. She stares.

Rosie. Something's wrong with the whole world, it seems! First the war with its miseries. And now this.

She looks at him; but he is lost in the amorous transports of the barnyard. She goes and touches him. He jumps.

Boy, I'm sorry!

He grunts, and holds the passage with a finger.

As for my wicked vow, I didn't mean it. I never do mean anything. What, sever the one precious bond that links our loneliness? No, Archie: some things are too sacred! Turkey-trotting's one of them. Twinkle's another.

He suffers her to share his lowly seat.

Why are *you* so unhappy?

LEGGE. Unhappy, what!

ROSIE. No one is happy, contemplating suicide. Besides, I see it in your face. The moment you bite your lip, I know it means you're suffering. Instinct, I suppose! That's what women are for—to have instinct and help the unhappy. Ah, how true that is!

He blinks and bites simultaneously.

Won't you tell me, Archie?

LEGGE. Well, there is—something. Worrying all day! 'Pon my life, these women! . . . .

ROSIE (*cooing*). Ye-es? We're getting on very nicely!

She waits expectantly. He looks at his nails; then answers:

LEGGE. Same old thing! Always the same old thing! Another letter from—Her!

ROSIE. From your wife? Oh! Poor Archie!

LEGGE. Knew you'd pity me. Thanks, little woman.

He marks the book, and they clasp hands there by the altar. Presently, she falters with infinite delicacy:

ROSIE. Wouldn't you like to show me the letter?

LEGGE. Rosie, I wouldn't for the world! She's as unsympathetic as a fish! Oh, these fishy women! And with a man like me too, all sunny warmth and love!

ROSIE. I know, I know! Ah, how well, I know!

LEGGE. Imagine! Wants me to go home now! Home!

And he laughs most hollowly.

ROSIE. Horrible!

LEGGE. And sarcastic! Listen to this! . . . .

He rips the letter from his pocket.

"It's quite safe now: the war's nearly over." There's marrying one of these unsexed literary women! Always so darned sarcastic! "Do you ever remember you're a father?" Me, mind you, who can't speak of Billyboy without lumps in my throat! Poor little chap! Then a lot of drivel about *philandering in the Archipelago!*—meaning, of course, you! Doesn't that show you what Georgina is?

ROSIE. It all seems so awful! A life like yours, spoiled by such a heartless creature!

LEGGE. Just what I say! By Jove, if only someone—someone different, someone more like you . . . .

ROSIE (*very gently*). I know what you would say, but it was not to be. Only, I have helped a little, Archie? Perhaps our beautiful friendship has not been wholly wasted!

LEGGE. No, not wasted. Bit wobbly! Rosie! I say though really, Rosie—you and me, don't you know—eh, what? . . . .

His passion shakes her for the moment. Then she answers steadily:

ROSIE. I will be your sister, Archie. Try and bear it. However it hurts.

LEGGE. I have a sister. She's worse than Georgina.

Rosie. These strange sweet intimacies! Perhaps they mean we may have met before. In some other world.

Legge. Jolly sure of it, if you ask me. Anyway, that explains the Kafenia. Fellow can't very well turkey-trot with a woman like you, and *this* in his pocket.

He rams the letter back again.

Knew you'd worm it somehow. Now you know all.

Rosie. *I know all!* What does that phrase . . . . Ah! Archie, do you happen to know a woman of the name of Polly?

Archie *evidently does.*

Legge. Well, of all the caddish . . . . That's Martin! I thought some pure-minded, backbiting . . . . Polly who?

Rosie. I'm not sure of the surname. Sounded rather French. But I'm positive about Polly.

Legge. Martin, I'll swear! Catch me telling him anything again! There's military honor for you! Yes, and that's how Georgina came to know about you! Captain Basil Martin, eh? Of all the sneaking, crawling . . . .

Ion *bursts in with a telegram for* Rosie.

Ion. Oh, that bad boy, how I grab him off my tree! There! It is the telegram that did not come. The cable, it was cut by the big war, and it is all a day ago late. And my Moon, she will rise, and not a fig in the basket! Oh, the Turk!

And snatching up his basket, he trots back into the garden.

Rosie. Now *did* you gather a single word, he said?

LEGGE. Lot of Greek gabble, no! It's that fellow Martin, I'm after!

> *And as* ROSIE *opens her telegram,* BASIL MARTIN *limps in from the garden. He is in white mufti, his left arm slinged.*

BASIL. Don't worry, I'm here.

> *He drops five drachmas into his hand.* LEGGE *pockets them.*

Legge, you have all the delicate instincts of a millionaire.

LEGGE. Come up by aeroplane? Bit slippy for the wounded hero, aren't you?

BASIL. Still solicitous about my wounds, dear boy? *You* know I'm only foxing.

ROSIE. Oh! . . . .

> *She has read the telegram, and now gazes blankly into space.*

BASIL. Hello! Bad news?

ROSIE. Devastating! My sister is coming back. Tomorrow.

BASIL. Diana! Impossible!

ROSIE (*reading*). "Arriving five tomorrow: Diana."

BASIL. How can she tomorrow, when the only boat . . . .

> *She hands him the telegram. He studies it very carefully.*

Ion said anything?

ROSIE. Ion! He's done nothing all afternoon, but sing silly songs and rave about the moon.

Basil (*slowly*). Singing again, is he? What's he up to now?

Legge. Picking figs.

This interests Basil. *He glances up at the villa, then returns the telegram.*

Basil. Thanks. Let me see, Diana's been gone three years. She skidaddled just . . . .

Rosie (*bridling*). Just before my marriage!

Basil. We're both egotists, Mrs. Fleming! I was about to say, just after I left for Central Africa.

Rosie. I really don't see what *you* had to do with her going!

Basil. That's true. We were great enemies. She never did love soldiers.

Legge. Course, I'm only recent! Can't pretend to Martin's footing with the family! Positively first time I heard you *had* a sister! But if she's anything like you . . . .

Rosie. But she isn't, she isn't! There's the tragedy! That's why I never mentioned her. Oh, the shame, the unutterable shame, the degradation!

Legge. I say though, bit thick! Not really!

Rosie. Absolutely! I've tried to hide it for three long miserable years! What's the use? Archie! My sister is—Diana Brand!

Legge. Diana Brand! Your sister!

Basil. Well, what the everlasting blazes, if she is?

Rosie. Captain Martin!

LEGGE. Yes, Martin!

ROSIE. Is it possible, you never heard?

LEGGE. Did you never read the newspapers?

BASIL. How could I, you ass? I was busy dodging lions in the jungle.

ROSIE. Since your return! Didn't they tell you, on the battlefield?

BASIL. How could they—Mrs. Fleming? I was busy dodging shrapnel in the welkin.

LEGGE. Don't you know of the policemen?

ROSIE. The trial, the imprisonment?

LEGGE. The things she's said, the things she's done?

ROSIE. The thing she is!

BASIL. Good God, no! What?

ROSIE
LEGGE } (*together*). A suffragette!

BASIL *takes this very quietly*.

BASIL. Good old Diana! Down to bed-rock militancy at last. Of course, I knew her interest in the movement, but —Policemen!

Tell me, when did this—terrible possession first afflict her?

ROSIE. There's the mystery!—The very moment I announced my engagement. Jealousy, I suppose! After all, with so few men to go round, there must be some old maids, and why not Diana? So selfish! But there she was! Bounced out of the house— Hadn't even the decency to wait for the wedding!—and began rampaging at once, all over the world.

Basil. Humph!

Legge. Votes for Women, don't you know. All that tosh!

Basil. Ah!

Rosie. Heaven knows, I'm not one to speak ill of the dead; but poor dear Papa was so foolish! Taught her Greek and gadding about and all kinds of unwomanly things. Why, she'd even go digging with him and David and the men! Improper, I call it! No wonder she couldn't get a husband! And her dress! . . . . Well!—practically trousers! I suppose that's how it all began.

Basil. Yes, I see the trousers! And there was that jolly Greek thing she wore in the afternoon. Blue, I remember, like her eyes! It would be just about this time. The day's digging was over, and she'd trot upstairs to change. Then presently, we'd hear the beautiful Hymn to Aphrodite—Sappho's very own, to Brahms's music! And that was the signal for Ion, with figs from the garden.

Legge. My word! Poetical!

Basil. Why not? Diana's a pretty fine woman.

Legge (*interested*). No—really?

Basil. Oh, quite! Only—Legge! It isn't safe to tell her so, until you know her a bit!

Rosie. Everyone to his taste, Captain Martin! I hope you won't be disappointed this time tomorrow, when Diana comes swaggering out here in knickerbockers!

Basil. Mrs. Fleming, I'd endure her in a fillibeg!

The voices of David Fleming *and* Prout *are heard in the cellar.*

David. What the Hades! . . . .

Rosie. That's David!

Prout. Don't apologize, sir! Step right over me! Simply a little inquiry into the ways of a worm!

David. Wriggling down there on your stomach!

And he emerges in muddy khaki and gaiters, bearing a pickax. He is a handsome, irritable-looking man, moustached, with imperious eyes.

Well, another prodigious victory! Something to make old Evans and the whole cabal of them turn green with envy! Guess what I've struck! A regular crockery shop! Minoan goddesses by the score! And a bull to . . . .

Rosie. David, this is no time for archaeological disquisitions! I have something awful to tell you! How shall I begin? It's tomorrow! Tomorrow afternoon, at this very hour . . . .

A woman's voice floats out from the villa, singing the "Hymn to Aphrodite." They all stand spellbound.

David. My God!

And a moment later, collects himself.

Legge. How ripping! Who is it?

Nobody answers. The voice comes nearer.

'Pon my word, that's what I call . . . .

He mounts the terrace, craning his neck toward the sound.

Ion *enters with the basket of figs.*

ION. The fig, they are gathered; the clouds, they are passing away; the moon, she is rising! Diana! Diana! My Beautiful Moon!

And DIANA BRAND *steps from the loggia. She is dressed in a classic chiton of delicate blue. Her song breaks off.*

DIANA. Of all the glorious surprises! Back already! Ion said, not till six!

ROSIE. Ion! . . . .

DIANA *runs down the stairway, and clasps* ROSIE *to her heart, half-weeping.*

DIANA. Rosie, darling! Oh, my dear, my dear, I've been a devil to you!

ROSIE. *Ion* said! . . . .

DIANA. Why, it's quite a party! Splendid! And where is . . . . Oh!

DAVID *is by the cellar. She faces him.*

DAVID (*gruffly*). Well, Diana! Good crossing?

DIANA. Excellent, thank you, David. Bit choppy, this end.

DAVID. Ah!

DIANA. And upon my word, the bitter enemy of my youth! This *is* a reunion! What quarrels we shall have! Still fighting, Basil?

He is by the garden. They join hands.

BASIL. Not this moment, Diana. And you?

DIANA. Oh, you poor dear, I didn't . . . . Anything very . . . .

Basil. Just a fall.

Diana. You mean . . . .

Basil. Yes: like Lucifer's. And you?

He watches her whimsically, as she turns to Ion.

Diana. And Ion with the figs! I knew you would! Ion, you darling, I must kiss you!

Ion. Yes!

Rosie, *disgusted, joins* Legge. *At the same time,* Prout *pops out from the cellar.*

Prout. Peculiar thing; but love among the worms . . . .

He observes the kiss.

Oh!

And so back into his hole.

Ion (*offering the figs*). So!

Diana. Oh! *Ta sukobasileia!* And sweet!—Um! . . . . *Melichrotes! Ambrosia!*[1] . . . . Ion, you bad old man! These figs . . . . Ah! The Tree You Must Not Pick!

Ion. That is just how you go too smart! Mr. Fleming, he will know the tree I pick for these! . . . .

David *moves involuntarily.*

The tree, you plant together, the Day of the Altar!

David. Day of the . . . . Yes, yes, perhaps there was some little ceremony, some—tree . . . .

[1] Τὰ *συκοβασίλεια*, "the figs royal."
Μελιχρότης, "sweetness of honey."
'Αμβροσία, ambrosia, "food of gods."

Diana (*with quiet irony*). I too dimly remember some—altar.

Ion. That is so. He dig, you plant: you make a dance about it and a song for Aphrodita! Then you tell me: "Go away, bad scamp! This tree, it is not forbid! It is ever and for always our tree: the Tree of Life!" So!

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the First Act.

THE SECOND ACT

FIG-LEAVES

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged: ROSIE *and* LEGGE, *up on the terrace;* BASIL *and* ION, *by the garden;* DAVID, *in the doorway.* DIANA *stands by the altar. After a moment of embarrassment, she speaks.*

DIANA. Won't somebody have a fig? Rosie? . . . .

The offer brings that lady flouncing down from the terrace.

ROSIE. Certainly not! I'm far too vexed to do anything so indecently irrelevant! What was that just now about Ion?

DIANA. *Was* there anything just now about Ion?

ROSIE. What's the use of pretending? He knew you were hiding up there all the time.

DIANA. Hiding? I was changing my clothes!

ROSIE. Clothes! If there's one thing I loathe, it is hypocrisy! If people must flop down upon you unexpectedly, they—they ought to prepare you beforehand.

DIANA. But my own dear disagreeable darling, you knew! My telegram distinctly . . . .

ROSIE. Telegram! . . . .

It is still in her hand. She reads:

"Arriving five *tomorrow.*"

DIANA (*brightly*). Exactly! Meaning *today.*

Rosie. Tomorrow meaning today! My dear, it's too transparent! And to think of that deceitful old sneak being in it too! A secret like *you* over our heads, and him plumping down there the whole blessed afternoon, like an evil-minded uncommunicative oyster!

Diana. Ion! . . . .

Both women are now focusing him.

Ion. Now I think I go and rake my rose-bed. That boy, he tramp it down, the—periwinkle!

And he goes off pleasantly. Singing.

Rosie. There, you see! Just piggish and insolent, all day long! I wish David would let us leave his beastly house! Horrid old graveyard!

David (*testily*). My dear, you know very well, with this infernal lease on our hands . . . .

Rosie. Other people can arrange leases. Archie can!

David. Well, I can't! Other people be . . . .

Rosie. You could, if you would; but you won't! Just on purpose to annoy me! Lot of ugly marble! And then *you* to turn up suddenly, startling the life out of me! It's all so inconsiderate!

Diana. Well, but Rosie, sweetheart, I have owned up I'm a devil! I can't do more, now can I, unless I throw in adjectives; and you know that isn't nice!

Rosie. It's not even as if I'd had any tea! I come home tired and miserable . . . .

David. Oh, for Heaven's sake, Rosie. . . . .

Basil *tries to be diplomatic and go.*

BASIL. I say, Legge, perhaps we'd better . . . .

But he gets jumped on for his pains.

DAVID. Certainly not! I shall deeply resent any such consideration for her feelings! Simply hysteria!

ROSIE. Nobody need go because of me! Lord knows *I* don't want to break up the happy party! I'm cross; and I don't mind the whole world knowing! I've had nothing but one exasperation after another, all day!

DIANA *is going to end this. She takes* ROSIE, *and with maternal hand plants her firmly on the bench to the left.*

DIANA. Rosie, you naughty child! Now sit down and behave, do you hear? You mustn't fly off into tantrums for nothing. It isn't good for you.

DAVID. It's this—turkey-trotting! Thing, my mother never even heard of! Goes out simulating frenzied fowl! Then comes home like this!

DIANA (*thoughtfully*). I see! . . . .

ROSIE (*sniffling*). Didn't turkey-trot!

DIANA. Didn't she then! Never mind, dearie, it's all right!

And with sudden impulse, she hugs her.

ROSIE. Poky old place!

She regards her boot, prodding the toe with her parasol, and from time to time continues sniffling.

DIANA. But come, don't let me keep you polite old things standing. Basil! David!—Oh well, you always did like strutting in uniform! Me, I'll take my ancient place in the lap of my Lady Mother.

She sits on the altar and helps herself to a fig. BASIL *takes the bench, right.* LEGGE *already occupies the top step of the terrace.* DAVID, *having made a movement toward* ROSIE'S *bench, elects to stand.*

That's the ticket! Now we're *all* comfy! Glad to see me, David?

DAVID (*shortly*). Course! Why not?

DIANA. Like old times, isn't it: me perched up here?

BASIL. Yes, and by Jove, doesn't it do the eyes good!

DIANA. A-ha! An unexpected salute from the enemy!

And the tears come involuntarily.

BASIL. Yes, you don't deserve it!—Same old termagant, I perceive! But you look stunning! Doesn't she, David?

DAVID. Course!

ROSIE *looks round at her and sniffs.*

DIANA. Thanks, Rosie, darling! Oh, but I tell you, it's good to be back! I was beginning to doubt I should ever behold my beloved island again! Naturally, the poor Dad's death and all the memories . . . . Then, the War yonder and before that, the Movement . . . . And now suddenly this call from Ion—nay, not Ion—God!—And here I am! Here in the wine-dark midmost of my glorious passionate Ægean! Here on my island, my little jewel of an island! Oh! The very whiff of the air, the wind, the goodly blast of it intoxicates me! It began yesterday, the moment

I left the Piraeus. The whole of the way across, I felt it. My island, oh, my precious island, how I have agonized for you!—And now at last—*Heureka!* You can't dream, Basil—you never had it: you can't, David, you never lost it: what it means to me! This gorgeous sea, the flame, the wonder, the miraculous clutch of it! Oh, thank God for Greece, her blessed islands, her seas, her skies, the never-ending loveliness of all good Greek things! I thought I had lost them! I thought I had put the joy and the love of them away from me forever! And they're flocking back again! They are here! Like children! Like my very own! Here! Knocking at the doors of my heart!

She pauses, mingling tears and figs. The silence is broken by an appreciation from ARCHIE:

LEGGE. I say though, ripping!

DIANA. I *am* a fool, flying off into long-winded dithyrambs like this! Only people always do, when they get excited! You see, I've been so used to—to speaking, the last three years: the moment I'm properly wound up, instead of keeping silent about it, I . . . . I just get up and—and make a speech!

And she takes a miserable little bite at a fig.

BASIL. Do it again, old girl: we like it! You're funny!

DIANA (*brightening*). You wretch, how I loathe you!

BASIL. Well, I never did have any luck with you, Di!

DIANA (*flaring*). If you dare to call me Di, again! . . . .

BASIL. There's the girl I love! Same old quarrelsome spitfire! And—Diana! Militancy hasn't thwarted your flirtatious wiles, apparently! Still sporting the feminine lure!

DIANA. Rosie, he's insulting my gown! He's known me so long as a navvy, whenever I dress decently, he begins ragging me! I suppose he's making *your* life a misery, these days. Why we ever endure him, I don't know: unless it's just silly woman's weakness for the army. What do *you* do with him, Rosie?

ROSIE (*sniffling*). Don't do anything! He's always digging with David! Desolate old wilderness!

DAVID *makes a movement of impatience.*

BASIL. Anyway, Diana, suspending hostilities for the nonce, I will confess you've done yourself proud! Isn't that right, David? David! . . . .

DAVID. Proud, of course, yes. Only, proud isn't the word.

ROSIE *registers both appreciations.*

BASIL. Spoken like a scholar: it isn't. There's only one word for it! Sorry it's not Greek, Diana; but you look—*peachy!*

Before DIANA *can immolate him,* ARCHIE *has another inspiration:*

LEGGE. And so say all of us! Haw! . . . .

BASIL (*sotto voce*). Oh, my Lord, what have I done?

And ARCHIE *doddles down to the altar.*

LEGGE. Positively, had the word on the tip of my tongue; and then let Martin chip in first. Peachy! That's the idea! Haw! . . . .

I say, oughtn't somebody to introduce me?—You don't know who I am. (*Waggishly.*) Course, we all know about *you!* Haw!

DIANA. No, really! How encouraging!

LEGGE. Fact, I assure you! All those policemen, what! And the magistrate Johnnies!

DIANA. Ah, yes, the Johnnies!

LEGGE. Bit thick; but must have been awfully jolly, looking on. Forcible feeding, what! Haw!
Hello, Rosie, pip-pip with that introduction.

DIANA. Is that necessary? Aren't we already so familiar, that . . . .

LEGGE. Haw, get you! These strange sweet intimacies, what! . . . .

This brings ROSIE *to her feet at once.*

ROSIE. It's Archie Legge. My sister, *Diana Brand!* My *elder* sister.

DIANA. Come now, Rosie, you needn't rub in the age! I'm only thirty.

LEGGE. Really! Don't look it, I'll swear! 'Pon my word, if you'd asked me, I'd have said something more like—like . . . .

DIANA. Something perfectly sweet and ingenuous like fifteen, I'm sure. *Won't* you sit down?

LEGGE. Here at your feet?—Rather! Like a piece of statuary: you above, me below: Beauty and the Beast, don't you know! (*To* BASIL.) What about it *now*, old chap? Haw! . . . .

His glee withers beneath ROSIE'S *eye.*

Course, I mean—I'm the Beast.

DIANA. Thanks, you are very comforting. May I offer you a fig?

LEGGE. Say though really, you're a sport, if you *are* Diana Brand.

DIANA. So glad, I'm satisfactory. Have another.

He takes three and ruminates awhile.

Our own planting, David! Catch! . . . .

DAVID. Nonsense, no! I'm not a little boy!

And he comes with great dignity and takes the fig, like a man. He then sinks meditatively to the left of ARCHIE.

DIANA. Enemy! . . . .

BASIL. That's me. Where's the juiciest?

He rises and takes his pick: then, looking round maliciously, says:

Hm! Think I'll be statuary too!

He sits the other side of ARCHIE. ROSIE, *isolated, scans the group and sniffles. Meanwhile,* ARCHIE'S *ruminations have come to an end.*

LEGGE. Course, I'm not one myself. Georgina is. She's everything—Socialism, New Thought, Rational Togs, all that rot. My idea is this. I like woman to be a woman. Give me woman on the pedestal: woman, the good sport, preserving the respect of man. Properly speaking, I represent the Antis. The Home, Darning, Dinner, Babies—all that kind of thing! Something beautiful about that, poetical, what!

The thought makes him blink a little.

Course, I like woman to be friendly. But what I say is, *Honi soit qui mal y pense!* So you see! There! In a nutshell! . . . . Get me?

DIANA. I never heard the case put better.

LEGGE. Haw! How's that, Mr. Battered Hero? Always did like blue! . . . .

ROSIE'S *sniffling becomes a downright whimper.*

DIANA. Why, you poor lonely mite! Never mind! She shall have a nice little fig all to herself, she shall!

She goes to her. The men rise.

ROSIE. I won't, I won't! I hate, I loathe, I abominate figs!

DIANA (*thoughtfully.*) Oh! . . . . Well then, she shall come and sit on the nice comfortable altar, with her naughty old sister!

She takes her there. The men instantly drift away: BASIL *and* DAVID, *to the benches right and left respectively; while* ARCHIE, *after spinning once round like a dog, squats in the middle on the grass, facing the women.* ROSIE *meanwhile weeps.* DIANA *pats and pets her, mopping her eyes.*

There! That all right?

ROSIE. Nothing's all right! Everything's all wrong! Everybody's so selfish!

DAVID (*rising*). Oh, my . . . .

ROSIE. It's all very well, saying, *Oh my!—You've* been happy, making a disgusting mess of yourself all day! First he goes neglecting me for a lot of snake-goddesses and mud: then he comes and says, *Oh my!* And I've had no tea.

DAVID. Then for the Lord's dear sake, my love, get some and . . . .

He'd like to say, "Choke yourself!" but daren't.

Oh, damn! I'll go and change my rags!

And he gets as far as the stairway.

ROSIE. There, you see! Husbands are all like that!

DIANA. David, you horrid thing, apologize!

DAVID (*turning*). Well, of course, I apologize. But she's such a confounded little fool!

And he commences to climb.

BASIL (*grinning*). Poison his tea, Mrs. Fleming!

LEGGE. This Johnny here—book, Rosie gave me—has an awfully good bit about neglectful husbands. He says: "The charming custom of the chimpanzee" . . . .

DAVID, *halfway upstairs has turned.*

DAVID. Rosie gave you a thing like that?

LEGGE. Yes, bit thick wasn't it? The woman did tempt me and I did . . . . Ever heard of it, anybody?

He shows the title with generous impartiality all round.

DIANA. Oh! *That* old back number!

LEGGE. What, you know it? 'Pon my word though, you and Rosie really . . . .

ROSIE. I've never even looked at the loathsome book!

DIANA. Haven't you? Oh, *I* have.

ROSIE. I daresay you have. But if Archie says it's improper, I haven't!

DIANA. Improper? Nonsense! Out of date, if you like. Belongs to the dark ages when people honestly believed in Science and Mother Nature! Two or three years ago, you know. Before the Judgment: before the Great Awakening! To that pagan over-fed generation of prigs and pedants, Sex was the one obsession! They and the little whining crowd of poets and self-indulgents held it over us like a bludgeon! But now, real live men and women, spiritual beings, are coming back into the world! Improper! Nothing so fascinating, Rosie, darling! Just funny and old-fashioned, that's all: like anti-suffragism!

ROSIE. I think Archie ought to know what's improper better than you! At least, I hope so. He's a man.

DIANA (*amused*). Perhaps you're right, Rosie.

LEGGE. Well, I don't go so far as to say improper. Wouldn't like to say that about anything. I just say—sporty!

ROSIE (*snapping*). I call it disgusting!

DIANA. Idiotic's my adjective! I'll stick by that.

BASIL. Piffle's a good word.

DAVID. What is the filthy work, anyway? I can't read a mile off! Name the unmitigated muck!

They all do, together.

OMNES. *Prout on Sex!*

An avalanche of pans and crockery occurs in the cellar. A watering-pot flies wildly forth of the door. All turn, DAVID *descending a step.*

DAVID. What in the name of Satanas . . . .

There is a general movement of inquiry.

ROSIE. Stop! If you do anything about it, I'll scream! You'll only bring him back again, and we'll never be rid of him!

DIANA. Whom?

ROSIE. Archie knows. He's hunting for worms! It's the author, and he'll clatter our heads off!

DAVID. I'll soon see whether any authors will clatter my head off!

ROSIE. Stop him, somebody! I'll scream!

DIANA. David, you're exciting her! David!

DAVID. Oh, well, if you're all bent on humoring her! . . . . Only, it's such darnation foolery! Talking to me about authors! . . . .

He sulks. DIANA *looks like a snubbed naughty child. An embarrassing pause.*

Come to that, I'm one myself! You don't find me clattering! Hysteria! . . . .

DIANA *tries to make things gay again.*

DIANA. That reminds me! Talking of authors, what a pig, I am! How about the book, David?

DAVID. Book! What book?

DIANA. Why, ours, of course! My father's! The book about the altar!

ROSIE. Of all the cheek! That's *our* book! David's!

Diana. Well, call it David's, if you like, little jealousy! He wrote it, I admit. Already published, David?

David (*nettled*). Published! Merely a matter of some fifty thousand copies or so! I suppose you do mean my .... *The Rib?*

Diana. The—what?

David (*tartly*). *Rib!*

Diana (*disappointed*). Oh! Is *that* what you called it?

David (*warmly*). And if I did! Why not?

Diana (*warmer*). Why not! Only that I think perhaps the poor Dad's own title—especially in view of the idea of the book, the significance he .... Besides, you had all his papers.

David. That's all very well, Diana; but since your father's death, his theories ....

Diana. Theories!

David. Well, you know what I mean! In spite of this pretended ignorance, you did see the book, I presume?

Diana (*shortly*). No! I've read nothing Greek for three years!

David. Oh well, if you weren't even interested! It made noise enough in all conscience!

Diana. Well, it was bound to do that! Its appeal to the Movement would at least insure that! If I hadn't been so busy elsewhere, I myself even ....

David. Movement! You talk about Movement! What Movement?

DIANA. What Movement! Yours, mine, my father's! The Movement to which we pledged ourselves! The Woman's Movement! That was the book's strong point—the modern application, the significance! It was the meaning of this altar. You don't think my father spent his glorious life delving into the mysteries of these islands, in order to provide lying little textbooks for universities, do you?

DAVID. Well, what was his wonderful discovery, all said and done?

DIANA. The Primaeval Matriarchy! The dawn of the world when God Himself was Woman! Something to give to Feminism the authority of the ages! It was no mere New Woman, my father found! His was the Ancient Woman rising from the dead! That was something worth writing about! The very scholars couldn't kill an idea like that! It put the book beyond their blind stupidity and blasphemy forever! Even your fool of a title couldn't alter that! Could it? . . . . Did it?

DAVID. Of course, if you want to be personal . . . .

DIANA. Personal! Do you think I'm considering *you?* Answer my question!

DAVID. What question?

DIANA. Do you wish me to say it all over again?

DAVID (*spluttering*). We'll have to go into that, some other time, when I—when I'm properly dressed! Upon my word, what with one thing and another! And now *that* noisy devil in the cellar come to plague me! Exploded theories! Feminism! Hysteria!

And he disappears grumbling up the stairway into the villa.

DIANA *has risen, tense with emotion.*

DIANA. It all seems so—disloyal! His own title! And his poor dying wishes—all . . . .

With a swift movement, she turns her back and goes up to the terrace. She stands looking bitterly over the sea.

ROSIE (*to the men*). There, you see! She's just like that! Always!

LEGGE. Really!

ROSIE. Absolutely! You see, she'll make a speech presently!

DIANA. Oh, why didn't I know, why didn't I know!

ROSIE. Well, my dear, if it's the book you're still fussing about, it's been advertised enough!

DIANA (*flashing round*). Advertised!

ROSIE. Well, don't get violent! Only, you who always pretended to be so interested in everything Greek . . . .

DIANA. How could I? I've been slaving night and day at the Front ever since the war began; and before that I was in prison!

ROSIE. Prison! She brags about it! Prison!

BASIL. At the Front! Do you mean—Red Cross?

DIANA. What do you imagine? Murdering?

LEGGE. Red Cross, how jolly! Tell us all about the war!

She blasts him with a look.

ROSIE. Prison!

DIANA. Yes, prison, prison, didn't you hear? Heaven knows, *that* was advertised widely enough!

Rosie. But you seem proud of it!

Diana. Wouldn't you be? It was for the Cause!

Rosie. Proud of being imprisoned for biting a policeman!

Diana (*fiercely*). That's a lie! I never bit anybody!

Rosie. *Votes for Women* then! Same thing!

Diana. Why, of course, I'm proud of it, you little timid silly! It showed God thought me worthy! Isn't Christendom proud of the Lord Jesus being haled before Pontius Pilate, and mocked and spat upon and gibbeted like a dog? It's the same with all of us! Saints, artists, socialists, philosophers, the glorious company of martyrs and believers, everywhere! Persecution! Scorn! Contempt! That's only the bitter witness of this world to the truth of the terrible witness burning within ourselves! You don't suppose that kings and cabinet ministers and the titled scum that pander to their lusts in newspapers are going to stand the flaming blasphemies of the Holy Ghost, do you? Any more than they did in old Jerusalem! Or in the days of Socrates! Or at the Reformation! Proud of it! Of course, I'm proud of it! It links me up with Christ.

Rosie. Did you ever hear anything so outrageous?

Basil. Never! Never! Except in the Bible!

Rosie. Captain Martin!

Legge. Yes, I say, Martin!

Basil *is the picture of gleeful imbecility.*

Basil. Yes! Now I think I'll go and help Ion rake that rose-bed! Unless, Diana, another little speech from you . . . .

Ah! Come along, Legge! Something tells me we are no longer wanted here.

Legge. Eh? What! I will! Bone to pick with you! After all, playing the game, old man: playing the game! If you *are* a soldier!

They go off arguing into the garden. The name "Polly" is heard echoing in the distance.

Diana *stands in proud indecision for a moment. Then she rushes down to the altar impetuously, pauses, and suddenly crumples up at the feet of* Rosie.

Diana. Rosie, darling, forgive me, forgive me! I didn't mean to be unkind to you: indeed, indeed, I didn't! Especially now! Now, of all times! It's my beastly temper! My ungovernable tongue! God help me, I . . . . Oh, I am so unhappy! Why can't I be like other people?

Rosie (*sadly*). You could be, Diana, if you'd only try! It's really quite easy. But you don't try.

Diana (*flaring again*). I do try! I'm trying all the time! My life is one long agony of trying! How dare you say, I don't? You say everything you can to—to . . . .

I came here, nothing but love and forgiveness in my heart, putting away all bitterness from me: not meaning to remember—anything! I wanted only to think of you! I wanted only to think of the loveliness of it all! Of the wonderful beautiful thing that's going to happen! And then every single one of you— *You*, most of all! . . . . Why *will* you be such a damned little lunatic? Oh, oh, there I am again, like a . . . .

Rosie (*whimpering*). I'm sure I do everything woman can to make myself pleasant to everybody!

Diana. I'm a beast, I know that! I'm sorry!

Rosie. Should think so! Making me miserable! . . . . It's so easy to be good and kind to people! Why can't people be good and kind? It's the little things that count!

Diana. Cry-babies, both of us! There, mop up, and don't be an idiot! Silly fools! One thing I hate, it is having a scene like this! We're acting like a couple of—women! There! Better? . . . .
Now, let's talk about—It!

Rosie. It! . . . .

Diana. Yes, the Secret.

Rosie. Oh, these mysteries! What secret?

Diama. Why, *the* secret, of course! The secret that brought me back again.

Rosie. I don't know of any secret that could bring you back again!

Diana. Rosie! The most exquisite secret in the world! Imagine! It came to me yonder—out there on the battlefield! I was sick, I was weary, I was worn out with long bitter watching of the dead and dying! Oh, that sepulchre of horror! And then That came! It was like a blessed resurrection! That message of New Life from Ion!

Rosie. Ion!

Diana. Yes, he heard you talking about it! You and David. Down there, under the fig-tree.

Rosie. Ion heard? But he's deaf! He never hears a single . . . . Heard what?

Diana. Oh, Rosie, how hard you're making it for me!

Here am I, singing you my little song of Elizabeth, and you won't understand!

Rosie. But you're frightening me! Tell me plainly what you mean.

Diana. Darling, whatever could I mean but one thing? The holiest, the most precious thing ever dreamed in the heart of woman. Motherhood, I mean! I mean—your little unborn baby!

Rosie. Motherhood! I!

Diana. Rosie! Rosie, darling!

Rosie. Stop! Don't touch me! It's all a hideous mistake! It's not true!

Diana. Not true! . . . .

Rosie. It's that evil eavesdropping old devil! He's got everything wrong!

Diana. Not true! . . . .

Rosie. It's true, David and I did discuss . . . . Intimately, as married people will . . . . In fact, we quarrelled—violently! Men are so selfish! But as for my ever . . . . On the contrary! The absolute contrary! That's why we quarrelled.

Diana. In other words, you—repudiate—motherhood!

Rosie. I don't see why *you* should object! I'm a free modern woman! In that at least!

Diana (*slowly*). Yes, I think I begin to understand.

Rosie. Let's have no more of it! It's not a subject . . . .

Diana. And I was useful yonder, among the dead and dying! . . . .

ROSIE. What has that to do with it?

DIANA. Only that I need not have come here after all!

She sits looking into unseen things.

ION *enters from the garden, singing. Crossing the yard, he halts with glad surprise at the watering-pot.*

ION. Ah, what I want! Some angel drop it for me!

A rattling comes from the cellar.

Yes!

He makes once more for the garden. ROSIE *follows his every movement suspiciously. She now calls sharply:*

ROSIE. Ion!

A whimsical smile creeps over his mouth, as he turns back.

Are you deaf?

ION. No!

And he passes out, a thing of joy and high Greek song.

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Second Act.

THE THIRD ACT

THE FLAMING SWORD

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged: Rosie, *seated on the altar;* Diana, *lost in thought, at her feet below.* Ion's *song is still heard, dying away down the garden.* Rosie *looks after him bitterly.*

Rosie. And that's the man, my poor dear dead Papa trusted so blindly. I always knew there was something sly about him. Only David never would listen to me. Men are such fools!

> Diana *slightly shifts her position, but makes no other comment.*

If he had, we'd have been gone ages ago. It's not even as if there were any real convenience. Granted, there's the garden and the fruit and all that; but Lord, the fuss, if ever anybody wants a fig! What did you do with them?

> Diana *hands the figs.* Rosie *pokes among them, but the best are gone.*

Self, that's the trouble! Nothing but self, self, self! If I've spoken once about that bath-room door, I have a thousand times! There again!—Only one bath-room! I've spoken about that too. Of course, the sea is pretty. But I don't like sea. Motherhood, indeed! What did he say precisely?

Diana. Do you think all that matters very much now?

Rosie. Not if you want to be disagreeable, dear. It was you first broached the indelicate subject.

DIANA. Sorry. I'll try and be more—feminine.

ROSIE. You needn't air any of your superior sarcastic speeches on me! I'm not impressed like some people. What's more, I consider your conversation just now when they were here, absolutely immoral! *You* may have thought it clever: but men don't really admire that kind of woman. They despise them! Oh, how they despise them!

DIANA. The men! Ah, yes, I had forgotten the dear men!

ROSIE. Well, I can't answer for your precious Captain Martin! But I'm perfectly certain Archie . . . .

DIANA. What! Have I shocked the chaste Archie?

ROSIE. You've shocked every decent man among them!

DIANA. Yes, how many might that amount to exactly, out of the three?

ROSIE. You'll soon see how many! *They* won't stand any of your wickedness! Not if they're men! Nor your Greek! Nor your gown! Nor God's Name taken in vain! They'll hate you like poison! At least they're Christians!

And she wails miserably. DIANA *turns upon her like a dragoness.*

DIANA. Stop howling you—Rib! . . . .

The effect is miraculous. She stops.

LEGGE *and* BASIL *are heard approaching from the garden.*

Ah! . . . . Well I'm ripe for them!

The two men enter, wrangling. ROSIE *breaks into a beatific smile.*

ROSIE (*sweetly*). So you're back again!

LEGGE. 'Pon my word, never heard such a barefaced wriggler in my life!

BASIL. Legge, as I'm an honest worm, you wrong me!

LEGGE. Soon know about that! Rosie! See that whitened what-d'you-call-it? Nice little surpliced choir-boy, *he* is! Flatly denies ever having told you a thing!

BASIL. I warn you, Legge, you are courting hideous doom!

LEGGE. Did you or did you not deny it?

BASIL. Did! But . . . .

LEGGE. Don't wriggle! That's Martin all over! First denies: then wriggles! Hands me out a rotten old homily on Woman's Rights! Yes, you did: out there! You're no soldier: you're a clergyman! (*Exploding.*) A woman like Polly has no rights!

ROSIE. Oh, yes, Polly! . . . .

LEGGE. There, that shows! Liar! She knows all!

BASIL (*grinning*). Legge, if you call me a liar again, I'll punch your head.

ROSIE. What I want to . . . .

LEGGE. One moment, Rosie! I'll settle his hash!

ROSIE. Yes, but is this Polly person . . . .

LEGGE (*testily*). Well, we all know about that! Polly is —Polly: never pretended she wasn't. What's done can't be undone, spilt milk, it's an ill wind, awfully sorry and all that! But, my Lord, if you're going to make a political question out of Polly . . . . What do you say, Miss Brand?

DIANA. I fear I don't quite fathom Polly. I find her so far, vague—though suggestive.

LEGGE. Course, I forgot! You don't know! Haw!

And for the moment, he is taken aback.

DIANA. I'm sure, you'll be sweet enough to enlighten me.

LEGGE. Well, Polly . . . . Mixed company, what! However, Modern Thought, don't you know: Plain Speaking! No silly shame necessary, that I can see!—All cultivated people! Rosie knows, we know, and *you've* read *this* fellow! So there you are! Nutshell! Polly! . . . . Get me?

DIANA. *Ad nauseam.*

LEGGE. Quite so! Haw! . . . .

He pulls at his moustache.

Same time, there's my wife. Georgina's all right, but she's one of these good women, you understand. No earthly idea of simple unashamed affection. Man's Life, don't you know, Affinity, Self-expression!—Means nothing to her! Deuce of a row! . . . .

Seems to me, existence is one long wobble between some good Bad Woman who treats you—cordially, and some bad Good Woman who gives you a bally rotten time! Nothing personal, of course!

DIANA. Gratified, I'm sure!

LEGGE. But for that holy-minded baa-lamb to go about blabbing it to everybody . . . .

DIANA. Do you think, perhaps, he may be a trifle dense?

LEGGE. Jolly well positive! Then to begin preaching!

Him! And *you* know what soldiers are! If there's one thing I hate, it is a moralizing aviator!

Diana. One meets so many of them!

Legge. Better begin writing tracts at once! Wrap 'em up in sugar-paper and send 'em to your maiden aunt! Then he calls himself an officer and a gentleman! Hasn't the sympathetic instincts of a salmon! *This* Johnny knows more! Lord, I could laugh! Little Polly Froufrou, a plea for Woman's Rights!

Diana. When she is palpably only one more plea for Woman's everlasting Wrongs!

Legge. Woman's everlasting—what?

Diana (*fiercely*). Wrongs, you leper, wrongs!

Rosie. Diana!

Legge. Haw! I see!—It's a joke! Woman's Rights—Woman's Wrongs! Awfully good! Good enough for *Life*.

Same time, don't let's frivol! Serious side to it, after all. If you only knew Georgina . . . .

Rosie. Archie! Archie! Don't you understand? She means it! She's insulting you!

Legge. Insulting me!

Rosie. Yes, it's what they do! They're all like that, these suffrage women!

Legge. But she . . . .

Basil. It's no use: he'll never understand! That kind of nymphomaniac never does!

Legge. Insulting me! Do I gather that I am being insulted by a woman who has been forcibly fed?

Basil. That's it, Legge! I see, I was mistaken! You're getting it!

Legge. Why then, I *am* insulted! Grossly insulted! Never so insulted in my life! Won't stand it for one moment! At least I hope I am a gentleman! I—I'll go into the garden and pick figs!

He goes out snorting.

Rosie *turns on* Diana *furiously:*

Rosie. I hope you'll never get a vote as long as you live! He's gone; and it's all your fault!

Diana. Well, that's one good thing! Too many of these jigging perverts about, flaunting their cheap lusts in people's faces!

Rosie. He doesn't jig! He's the only decent dancer in the Archipelago! And now he'll never, never, never come back any more!

Basil. Diana, your last remark makes me grasp the *Bacchæ* of Euripides better than I ever did before.

Diana (*captured by the idea*). That's interesting! . . . .

The thought so fascinates her, she is about to follow it up; but she is switched back to Rosie:

(*Violently.*) Rosie, if you begin howling again, I'll shake the life out of you!

Rosie. Yes, that's all you can do! Threaten and play the bully! It'll be bombs and breaking windows next!

Basil. Supposing I put in another little word! . . . .

They both obliterate him at once.

Both. No!

DIANA. We've had too many little words from men already! The world is full of them! And that was idiotically out-of-place about Euripides, anyway! It's about time women began talking!

BASIL. All the same, Diana, Verrall's great contention . . . .

DIANA (*stamping*). Basil!

ROSIE (*fishing for him*). There, you see! She's like that!

DIANA (*stamping*). Rosie!

ROSIE (*stamping*). I won't be quiet! I'm a woman too! I will talk! I will! I will!

DIANA. Rosie, if you keep on whining . . . .

ROSIE. You great big coward, I hate you!

DIANA. This comes of the vaunted Happy Home! This comes of the four smug walls of the dear Protected Life! This is your beautiful middle-class comfort and respectability and all the other infidelities! Blaspheme the deeper purposes and responsibilities of God's world! Then howling and whining, and apes like that dangling about the house!

BASIL. There's something in what you say, Diana!

DIANA. What do you know about it?

ROSIE. There, that's what you get! Serves you right! You wouldn't take my part, when she bullied me!

BASIL. Come now, Mrs. Fleming . . . .

ROSIE. No, I hate you! I hate you both! I hate you!

She bursts into a flood of tears.

Diana. Oh, these Niobes! No wonder, men despise us!

Rosie. There! Now she's back to suffrage again!

Diana. Suffrage, you simpleton!

Rosie. You began about men! What's that but suffrage? You're *always* arguing about it!

Diana. I never argue suffrage! Nobody does! The time for arguing suffrage passed ages ago! All the decent people accept it: the others are only so many wingless waddling dodos! This isn't argument, you—eocene! It's plain womanish rage! I'm just an ordinary overtaxed infuriated human creature, planted in a cosmos of gibbering lunatics! Oh, I know I'm a fool, I know I'm a fool, losing my head like this! You don't imagine I'm happy about it, do you? Argument! If you believe I'm standing up here, making myself hot and miserable, to regale you with Aristotelian discourse, you are jolly well mistaken! I'm simply telling you! The whole boiling of you!

Basil. Nevertheless, Diana, pyrotechnics like this . . . .

Diana. Anyway, my pyrotechnics don't destroy innocent babies and cathedrals!

Basil. True! Yet, as a serious contribution to the joyous occasion of your home-coming . . . .

Diana (*with biting emphasis*). Am I attempting to seriously contribute . . . .

Basil (*inexpressibly shocked*). Oh, split infinitive! Diana! And you the daughter of a scholar!

Rosie. Yes, she's always doing things like that!

Diana (*fiercely*). Am I, you little prig? And who is it, that's always . . . . Oh, what's the use?—Wasting time in a bedlam of chattering women and soldiers! (*Starting again.*) One thing, I'll swear! Never again, as long as I live . . . .

DAVID *appears hastily from the loggia above, a thought in his mind. He is washed and "groomed" and immaculately clad in cream with a golden blazer. He comes dressed to his doom.*

DAVID. And another thing, Diana! . . . .

A door is heard slamming in the house.

Curse that bath-room door! Why can't somebody . . . . It's about that book, Diana! I've been thinking up there, thinking furiously; and . . .

Meanwhile he has descended the stairway.

ROSIE. You'd better tell him yourself! I'm sick of speaking!

DAVID (*irritably*). What's that? Tell whom? What?

ROSIE. Your precious Ion! If I've spoken about that door once, I have a . . . .

DAVID. Yes, yes, we don't want the usual sermon over it! Everlastingly . . . . Now you've driven clean out of my mind what I wanted to . . . .

DIANA (*ominously*). That book! My father's book!

She adds with concentrated irony:

The Rib! . . . .

DAVID. Exactly! My book! *The Rib!* . . . .

And there momentarily he stops. They regard each other intently.

ROSIE. Only wants one of those rubber things, they . . . .

DAVID (*explosively*). Oh, Rosie, do for Heaven's sake . . . .

She goes and perches conspicuously on the third step of the stairway, dramatizing herself as God's Little Despised Worm.
BASIL *sits on the bench, right, his head bent, thinking. And remains so.*

ROSIE. Pigs!

Presently DIANA *speaks:*

DIANA. Well, what about it?

DAVID (*blustering*). Well, *what* about it?

DIANA. You intimated just now, you had something . . . .

DAVID. So I have! Volumes! I've thought of nothing else, the whole time I was dressing! What the devil's wrong with the title, I'd like to know! It's conveniently short; it's popular; descriptive.

DIANA. It misrepresents my father. It's a lie.

DAVID. It's been recognized by every reputable university in the world.

DIANA. So was Iscariot's kiss by the Sanhedrin.

DAVID (*flaring*). If your father were such a stickler for trifles, why on earth didn't he get you to write the book? You were almost as much acquainted with the discoveries as I.

DIANA (*grimly amused, conceding the point*). Almost!

DAVID. Very well then! Why didn't he . . . .

DIANA. Why? You ask me why?

DAVID (*hesitating*). Yes, I—I do!

She searches him steadily and replies:

DIANA. Well, there *were*—reasons.

DAVID *winces, but remains silent.*

For one thing, the poor soul died. Or have you forgotten that too? Don't you remember, there was a funeral: out in the little Cemetery of Apollo yonder—where he found the altar. Rosie wept, I recollect; and you made a beautiful speech! Quoted Pericles! That bit about ancestors! About lordly fathers! About the obligations we owe the masterly dead!

ROSIE *sniffs at Pericles.*

DAVID. Of course, if you care to twit me on my humble beginnings, my poverty . . . . I admit, I owe your father much. Much!

But she shakes her head relentlessly.

DIANA. No, you can't escape me, that beggarly way. It isn't the humble beginnings, Doctor David Fleming!

DAVID (*spluttering*). It's all this infernal fuss about titles, I do so violently deprecate!

DIANA. So I observe. I wonder what's behind it.

DAVID. Even the copyright law, with its multitudinous damfooleries, doesn't acknowledge titles!

DIANA. Oh, you're safe enough, legally! My point is merely honor, *moral* right!

DAVID. Well, and what moral wrong . . . .

DIANA. Tampering with the fruits of another man's life. It's like infanticide! It's like child labor!

DAVID. All the same, thousands . . . .

DIANA. Oh, I know it's done! It's done in the best literary circles! People get decorations, enormous triumphs, out of it! But what kind of a low-down cur, do you think, would lend himself to it?

DAVID. I must protest . . . .

DIANA. So must I? A little more vociferously than you! Don't you understand? This is *Ananke*, *Nemesis*, the Day of Judgment, come upon you!

DAVID. Well, since you're quoting, *The Rib* has good sound biblical . . . .

DIANA. Listen, you shifty knave! There's more behind this temporizing, than mere titles! Disloyalty upon disloyalty! I'll unmask them all! First, answer me that question you evaded just now, when you went upstairs.

DAVID. What—question?

DIANA. Concerning this—*Rib*, you trickster!

DAVID. I tell you, that title . . . .

DIANA. We've done with titles! Come to the book itself! What have you done with my father's Interpretation?

DAVID. If you'd only . . . .

DIANA. My father's Interpretation!

DAVID. Yes, but . . . .

DIANA. The Interpretation!

DAVID. The entire archaeological outlook has changed, since your father's day!

DIANA. In three years? In these waters? During the war?

DAVID. It's terribly difficult to explain. You see, when one man writes a book, and another . . . .

DIANA (*impatiently*). Provides every scrap of the material, yes, yes! . . . .

DAVID. Yes, but all so disarranged, ill-digested, so fantastical—theoretical . . . .

DIANA. Why, the whole thing was planned! Only wanted writing! Every particle of the evidence pigeonholed and docketed! And the Interpretation, with this altar as the sign and symbol of it, apocalyptically perfect!

DAVID. That was just the point. I tell you, your father's a priori speculations . . . .

DIANA. Well?

DAVID. How can I explain, and you hectoring me like this? If you'd only keep calm . . . .

DIANA. Go on. I'm deadly calm.

And she is. But DAVID *blunders on.*

DAVID. Of course, everybody admires your father. I myself owe him—lots. After all, he did . . . . There was the altar.

DIANA (*ironically*). There was!

DAVID. Naturally, in those first days, we all got tremendously excited. These wonderful discoveries, and the recognition . . . . I'm afraid we rather lost our heads. And without doubt, your father's vigorous personality, his fine rugged pioneer work . . . .

Diana. Fine rugged wow wow wow, yes?

David. Well, damn it, since you will be rude, there was a reaction! There had to be! Theories are all very well; but, my Lord, theories that line you up with all the political anarchies of the present day . . . . They had to go! They *had* to! Men's minds sober down: inevitably, they take on judgment, balance, a more conservative safer point of view . . . .

Diana. The irreligious hounds, do they?

David. Oh, the devil! You *won't* understand!

Diana. But you're talking like some pettifogging doctor of an university!

David. Well, I suppose that's what I am! After all, Oxford, Göttingen, Berlin . . . .

Diana. My God!

And she bursts into bitter laughter.

David. Anyway, that's more than ever your father . . . .

Diana. Black abominable ingrate!

David. Oh! How can I make you understand? These actions are forced upon one! They are a necessity! They are a part of life! Almost a biological necessity! Like war! Like many things! Can't you understand?

Diana. Oh, I understand, well enough! You have taken my father's glorious golden child of fire and crucified it for your own safe, sober, desecrating *Rib!* Oh, you have mangled the unborn babe in the womb—like those other pedagogic monsters yonder! You! You! You, that owed him everything! Why, the clothes you wore, your education, the bread that fattened your sly reptile life . . . . Everything! And then—here! Here, among the miracles! Didn't the very stones clamor against you: the glens, the caverns, the quarried wonders of his beloved kingdom? And the garden! There, where he and you and I . . . . when the nightingales . . . . Oh, sacrilege! Contamination!

And all for what? For recognition! For success! For the petty plaudits of the universities! The universities that turn down classics for a bastard culture of efficiency! The universities that disqualify women, cast out pacifists, economists, musicians! The universities that foster atheism, or worse—revivalistic devil-worship! The universities with their sinister background of the landlord, swindling ironmongers, oilmongers, the canaille monarchies! Do you think the poet-dreamers that revealed the ancient secrets of these sacred islands, cared for universities? Did Schliemann care? Did Evans? Did any of them care? No! They were the little workmen band of true believers, that turned their backs on dictionaries and dead bibles! The word came; and forsaking everything, they took up living pick and shovel, and they followed. My sublime father transcended them all! In a sense, he was all! His great spirit brooded over this Ægean like some olden God, transfigured and shown anew. He offered us his precious child to redeem us from the pagan darkness of these Pharisees; and you, like Judas, have betrayed him!

David (*feverishly*). You have said cruel, unforgivable things, Diana! Nevertheless, I still stoutly maintain.. . . .

Diana. Oh, I know the fetters you have forged won't break so readily!

David. What do you mean?

DIANA. What that old Greek proverb means—the one you used to quote so glibly: *Character* is destiny!

DAVID. I don't perceive the application.

DIANA. Look inside you, man! There at your black heart's core! There where the hidden thoughts dwell unspoken, making and unmaking forever the destinies of life. You know the secret thing, I name! False one way, false another! That's where all these piled up infidelities began!

DAVID. Infidelities! Do you charge me . . . .

DIANA. Look inside, I say! Link by link, you have forged it for yourself! You can't escape! Not until you pay the uttermost farthing! Character is *destiny!* Out upon you, unfaithful servant! Faithless to your dying master's wishes! Faithless to your scholarship, your calling! Faithless to your brethren, the toiling comrades of the awakening world! Faithless first of all in—Love!

DAVID. Diana, how dare you!

ROSIE. David, don't listen to her! Oh, you vampire! David has his faults!—Nobody knows that better than I! He's mean, he's selfish, he's neglectful! But at least, at least he's faithful!

She utters the last word in a high, exacerbated howl.

DIANA. Ah!—You! I had forgotten *your* share in all this holocaust of desolation!

ROSIE. I'll be revenged on you for this, yes, I will! I'll do something desperate! I—I'll put it in the hands of my solicitor! I'll tell everybody what you are!

DIANA. Trumpet it in the ears of Zeus the Thunderer and all the choiring galaxies of high Olympos! Trumpet it through the echoing abysses of Hell, and rouse the wrath of Rhadamanthus! I'll trumpet first!

David. Diana!

Diana. He was mine—mine, do you hear?—before you came! Oh, I know no word was spoken! Only the trees whispered it! Only the maiden moon, the stars, the violet flaming of the dusk, looked down upon it! It dwelt within, the vast unuttered longing of our hearts! An exquisite silence! You came, and stole him from me!

David. Diana!

Diana. My father's illness helped you! You crept in like a serpent, whilst I nursed him, and you worked your poisonous will. You, the simple little school-girl from Germany! You, the little sly minx of the knowing mind, of the furtive novelette, the baby! You, the little turkey-trotter from the boarding-school! You knew, you knew what you were doing! You came like Eve, that thief in the night, that wanton, that Rib of all the sorrows of the ages, and you robbed me of my Eden! I was his Lilith, that wretched, first, forgotten one; and you stole him from me!

David. Diana! . . . .

Diana. And what have you done for him? This! Turned him and all the promise of his youth to spiritual beggary! What have you done for yourself? You are idle, vain, luxurious, you don't labor! You work people socially for your own ends! You fritter away your time with the lecherous nincompoops of that Saturnalia, the modern dance! You despise your husband's profession; and yet you live upon his bread! You cadge! You sponge! Why, you are not even an honorable wife! You claim the advantages of a man's hearth and home: you prate of faithfulness; and then—you repudiate his child!

Rosie. Silence, you . . . .

Diana. Why should I be silent? I have been silent for three long bitter years! I will shout it to the heavens! I will shout until the Blessed Mother of God flings wide the windows of those glittering mansions, and looks down in pity upon womankind! I speak no longer for myself alone! But for all women! All the despised ones! All the cast-out Hagars, the Medeas: the childless Liliths of Eve's polluted Eden! *Aiai, epathon tlamon epathon megalon axi' odurmon!*[1] Oh, that ancient singer of the woes of women—"the human, with his droppings of warm tears"—he knew! . . . . He knew! . . . .

She is about to break down.

David. Nevertheless, I invincibly maintain . . . .

Diana. Out of my path! I have done with men now!

And recovering herself, she passes like flame into the garden.

David *is left stupefied for the moment.*

Basil *rises heavily from his meditation.*

David. Basil, I give you my word of honor as a gentleman . . . .

Basil. Oh, go to the devil! I'm after Diana!

He limps into the garden.

David *turns towards his wife. She is glaring at him. He glares back again, bristling his moustache.*

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Third Act.

[1] αἰαῖ, ἔπαθον τλάμων ἔπαθον μεγάλων ἄξι' ὀδυρμῶν, "Woe is me! I have suffered, I have suffered, mighty wrongs, worthy of lamentations!" (Euripides Medea 111.)

THE FOURTH ACT

THORNS AND THISTLES

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged: Rosie *and* David *stand glaring at each other. The first violet touch of twilight faintly tinges the Ægean sky.*

Rosie. To think that such a thing should happen to me! And I've done nothing whatever to deserve it!

David. Rosie, do for God's sake stop ventilating your own personal feelings! I'm the real sufferer, not you! Do think a bit about me!

Rosie. But she said that you and she . . . .

David. She also said that you and that nincompoop . . . .

Rosie. Yes, but here! In my own Eden! It all seems so . . . .

David. Well, well, and what then? I confess to a certain streak of sentimentality inherited from my mother. Racial, I suppose! She was . . . . Besides, it's not true! Didn't you hear her say, no word was spoken? Can't a man have a racial streak from his mother, without you . . . .

Rosie. Yes, but Diana! My own sister! She *said* you were an evader! If there's one thing I loathe, it is unfaithfulness!

David. But I'd never even met you!

Rosie. You should have known! You should have known, that I was waiting for you in the Yet-to-be!

David. There you go again! Here am I, a man whose whole career is blasted, his ambitions blown to smithereens by that woman; and you do nothing but discuss your own wounded little vanities! Can't you realize the immensity of this tragedy? It's cataclysmic! It's like the war! It's like the toppling of an empire! And you choose just this moment, when I am girt in by an implacable iron ring of enemies . . . .

Rosie. Enemies! . . . .

David. Yes, pack of myopic degenerates! And they can't see, they simply can't see how right I am! Curse them, oh, curse them! I tell you, the hymn of hate that rises up in my heart . . . .

Rosie. But there's only one! Only Diana!

David. She'll tell everybody! There's not a newspaper in the world that won't back up her story! As for these others, my competitors, don't you know, the whole perfidious crew is against me? Just waiting for my downfall! Well, they've forced this thing upon me! If it's war, I'm prepared for them! Envy, that's the secret! Envy of my attainments! Envy of my far-flung reputation! Envy of my—well, culture and efficiency!

Rosie. I know it's dreadful to be misunderstood!

David. I don't mind being misunderstood, if they'd only stop interfering with my schemes! A man like me is bound to be misunderstood! What do they know of advanced Zarathustrian psychology? That woman prates of your father's scholarship! What of me? I'm a super-scholar! This isn't egotism! This isn't megalomania! It's simply a priori subjective assurance of manifest destiny: I know I'm It! Got it from my mother! As a child, I strutted with a little cocked hat and a flag and a drum, singing, "Me above everybody!" And then to be goaded from my peace-loving life, by battalions of grasping barbarians, who won't even acknowledge their infamy!

Rosie. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! . . . .

David. Oh, Shakespeare, *my* Shakespeare: so much mine, I could almost believe I wrote him! He knew! He knew, when speaking out of the agony of *his* great heart, he said: "The time is out of joint! Oh, cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!"

Rosie. Now, *he's* spouting!

David. There's one thing! If I'm dragged down, they shall all come too! I've prepared for this! I believe in preparedness! I laid my plans long ago—when I was in your father's employment! I saw the old man weakening, long before anybody else did! I calculated to a nicety! Then when at last, the day . . . .

Rosie. As though any of it really very much mattered!

David. You'll know soon enough, whether it matters! When we are beggared! No more home comforts! No more entertainments! No more jolly little dinners! . . . .

By the bye, what *was* that mess you gave me for lunch? You know I like my food wallowing in butter! And now, on top of everything—This!

Rosie. That was your darling Ion! I knew you'd be cross!

David. Seems to me, wherever I turn, my will is thwarted, my loftiest ideals profaned! My mother was the only woman that could ever manage kidneys! Then for that shameless hussy, your sister, to stand up there and brazen me out . . . .

Rosie (*on her mettle*). Anyway your mother couldn't . . . .

David (*on his*). She never mistook dry shreds of desiccated rag for kidneys!

Rosie. You should hear Ion about your mother!

David. There, I'm done with you! I'm done with the whole family! Oh, loneliness! Oh, intolerable loneliness of the Over-soul! I'll be revenged for this! I'll think out something catastrophic, irrevocable, some deed of frightfulness! I'll—I'll send in my resignation! I . . . . No, I won't! That would be too simple! They might not see the heroism of that! Something with more sentiment to it, more drama! . . . . Ah! I have it!

Rosie (*whimpering*). Always this, always this! When there's kidneys!

David. Yes, that's the idea! Yonder, on some tall cliff overlooking my own Ægean, my cloak about me, lonely, like an emperor: the pistol at my head. . . . .

Rosie. My God! It's in the air!

David. Then, when they'd all be crying, *Crucify!* . . . . And yet, perhaps, before the fatal moment, one little speech, a swan-song . . . .

Rosie. David! David! . . . .

He gazes at her, long and terribly.

David. Rosie, you are right! I see! I see! Death would be sublime; but it is prouder, braver, grander still to live and face them out! Eternal-Womanly, ever beckoning, you have shown me the diviner way! I'll live and civilize them!

Rosie. My hero!

DAVID. Not quite, my pole-star; but I will be! Yes, I see the way! That book, it was intrusted to my sacred care by One alone! We two will guard it! Myself and God! Yes, with the sword unscabbarded if needs be, against any woman in the world!

And as he says it, he looks every inch a king.

Somebody coming! If it's Diana, don't say where I am. I'll slip out quietly.

He darts for the cellar; but on the threshold jumps as though stung.

What the . . . .

And he sneaks upstairs swiftly into the villa. A moment later, ARCHIE *lounges in lugubriously from the garden.*

ROSIE. Oh, it's *you!*

LEGGE. Yes, it's me.

ROSIE. Boy!

LEGGE. Little woman!

ROSIE. Won't you sit down?

They do so, at the base of the altar.

Archie, I have some bitter news to break to you.

LEGGE. Really! That's odd! I have some bitter news to break to you!

ROSIE. Try and be brave, Archie! Nobly, for my sake!

LEGGE. 'Pon my word! Very thing, I wanted to say myself!

ROSIE. Why, what can you . . . .

LEGGE. No! Ladies first, Rosie!

ROSIE. Then, briefly. Archie—Oh, my poor boy!—We must part forever!

LEGGE. Positively uncanny! That's the identical . . . .

ROSIE. I know what you would say! Your soul divined it! I'm like that too. After all, sympathy such as ours surpasses words!

LEGGE. Yes, but Rosie . . . .

ROSIE. No, Archie, please! I can't bear it! I know the passionate longings, the unuttered anguish, the vain regrets! I can read them in your eyes!

He blinks.

Let them rest there. Life is very hard, isn't it, Archie?

LEGGE. Bally awful, if you ask me.

ROSIE. And this is the end. You will go your way; and I, mine. Like that other ill-starred couple in the long-ago. I'm Josephine: you are Napoleon. I must follow my destiny. Only, I believe in history, it was the other way about.

LEGGE. Quite so.

ROSIE. Isn't it strange, Archie, in misery like ours, when all else fails, there is still one comfort left! Destiny, Fate, the Thing that Had to Be!

LEGGE. Often thought so myself!

ROSIE (*her heart breaking*). Oh, Archie, Archie, shall you ever forget That Night? That night of the naval ball! The night they sank the battleships!

She quavers a sad remembrant phrase of haunting rag-time.

Do you remember? . . . .

Legge. Rather! . . . . And afterwards, don't you know, the lobster . . . .

Rosie. Yes, the dear broiled lobster too! Each tender thought has place in memory's sad dream! Poor foolish tears! . . . .

He blinks. She hands him her handkerchief. He dabs, and gives it back.

Do you know, Archie, I have a presentiment, I shall never, never dance again!

Legge. No, really! Why?

Rosie. Something whispers it! I'm like that! In the first place, there'll be no men! Doesn't the war come home to one? And then, with all that grief abroad, it may not be considered quite—the thing! No! I shall turn elsewhere. I shall find my place, be sure of it! Not so happy a place perhaps; but no less beautiful! I will take up something noble! Something sorrowfully lofty! Something to help a little. Possibly—spiritualism.

Legge. I was thinking of golf, myself.

Rosie. Do, Archie. It will buck you up. And now, before *Good-bye* . . . . You have heard my bitterness. What's yours?

Legge. There's the joke! Precisely the same thing! We must part forever! Haw!

Rosie. What! . . . .

Legge. Fact! Funniest thing I ever struck in my life! Got my things packed this afternoon! That's why I disappointed you at the Kafenia!

ROSIE. But Archie, why?

LEGGE. Deuced awkward to explain! You see, in that letter I wouldn't show you, Georgina said—I jolly well had to!

ROSIE (*rising*). Oh! Good-bye!

She has the manner of an icicle.

LEGGE (*rising*). Tra-la-la!

He is going: but returns.

I say, Rosie, last time, don't you know! Just one turn!

He tootles and assumes a gallinaceous posture. She remains unmoved.

Come now, Rosie, be a sport!

He flaps and squirms abdominally; but already her soul is turned to higher things.

BASIL, *watch in hand, reappears from the garden.*

BASIL. Legge, your boat sails in fifteen minutes. Now, don't argue! Remember what I said! When the Harbor Master's gun goes off, you do.

LEGGE. Why, the gun?

BASIL. Sundown: all safe! The vessel's neutral and babies aboard; so you *mayn't* be submarined!

LEGGE. Submarined! . . . .

BASIL. You have a quarter of an hour.

LEGGE. But . . . .

BASIL. Quarter of an hour. Come! I see Miss Brand approaching.

LEGGE *bolts at once for the cellar.*

LEGGE (*within*). Oh, get out of my way!

There is a sound of hissing.

BASIL. They fizzle at the end, don't they? These—affinities!

ROSIE. Captain Martin, Basil . . . . Let me call you Basil! I am so unhappy! Won't you be kind to me?

BASIL. I can't! I'm lame.

DAVID *creeps out from the loggia.*

Hello, David! Come down.

DAVID. I will brook no commands from . . . .

BASIL. Don't be an histrionic ass: come down, man! I want to talk to you.

And something in his tone makes him obey. He stands with ROSIE *on the left.* BASIL *is in front of the altar.*

Still sulking, because I told you to go to the devil? Did you go?

DAVID. Don't try to be funny!

BASIL. I'll be serious enough, presently. Ah, here she is!

DIANA *rushes in determinedly from the garden. Seeing them, she stops dead.*

Well, Di!

DIANA. Diana!

BASIL. Di! I'm in command here.

And she is silent.

Now, we're the whole happy family together again! Nice typical example of the blessings of Home, Sweet Home!

Automatically, they all turn their backs upon him.

You wouldn't do that, if you saw what I had in my hand.

They turn again. He has nothing.

DIANA (*laughing in spite of herself*). Silly idiot!

ROSIE *sniffs.* DAVID *looks as if all this is in very poor taste.*

BASIL. That's better! Let me see your pretty faces.

The women stiffen. DAVID *imperializes.*

Now, I'm here on ticklish business. I'm here offering a priceless boon. If I succeed, the boon is yours. I shall probably come off with unpleasantness anyway. In a word, I'm here to see if we can't turn this hopeless muddle into a Peace Conference.

ROSIE. I won't!

DAVID. I won't!

DIANA. I won't!

BASIL. Splendid! We're beginning properly already.

They look as if they could devour him.

DIANA. I will say just this one thing. It's what I came back for—that and my scarf. David, you are nearest. Thanks.

The transaction is made via BASIL. ROSIE *sniffs.*

It's this. I'm sorry I was so—excessive, just now. I apologize for many of the things I mentioned. We needn't go into particulars, but you all know what I mean. I said things that were caddish and unladylike and horrid! (*Flaring.*) And that's as far as I'll go for anybody present! Whoever she may be!

Rosie. That's just like her! She can't even . . . .

Diana. Rosie, you ungenerous little beast, if you dare to answer back . . . .

David. Yes, that's how these polemical females, the shrieking sisterhood . . . .

Diana. You be silent! I'm not talking to you! I'll never talk to you again as long as I live!

Basil. Am I, or am I not, the president of this Conference?

They all snap at him together:

Omnes. You—are—not!

David. My mother always said that women who . . . .

Diana. Mother! How dare you profane the name?

David. Profane! I'm honoring her! She made me what I am!

Diana *snorts hysterically. This gets* David's *dander up.*

Anyhow, she was no suffragette! She sprang from a long illustrious line of prolific protestant housewives!

Diana. Lord, can't you imagine how he's written the book!

David. My mother was . . . .

Rosie. Now you've started him on his mother, he'll never never stop! I'm sick to death of his mother! I hear nothing but his mother, morning, noon and night; and I'm tired of her!

DIANA. Rosie, stop howling!

BASIL. Steady on, Diana. Don't be imperialistic! Give the little nationalities a chance!

DIANA. Well, and if we're nationalities, which is *he?* He's . . . .

BASIL. Don't say it, Diana! That's carrying symbolism too far.

DIANA. Well, don't you dare to call *me* Germany! Or England! Or Russia! I won't be any of their filthy empires! I'm something crushed and hurt and hideously broken! I'm Belgium!

BASIL. Leopold's or Albert's?

DIANA. Well, I'm not as abominably outrageous as the one!

BASIL (*slowly*). Nor as abominably outraged as the other. Come, you be Poland; and pull yourself together.

DIANA *hesitates; then sinks down, and dissolves. There is a long silence.*

Yes, the thought of those two agonies ought to gag all our mouths.

There is a longer silence.

And that's how it all goes. Hatred, passion, bitterness, idle recrimination, violence—everything but getting down to the root of the matter and putting it right. It isn't that the underlying causes don't go deep enough; but, my Lord, the inappropriate way of dealing with them! That's what troubles me, the inappropriateness, the *non sequitur* of it all! Really, your little tin-pot quarrel here is very like that monster one out yonder. Landless Fritz and disinherited Bertie are now busy cutting each other's throats. In God's name, why? Because a gang of emperors and millionaires, lusting after a lump of gold in another man's land, twaddle a few obscenities about flags and fatherlands. Or motherlands, it doesn't much matter. I'm insulting all their blasted nationalities, including my own.

DIANA. I . . . .

BASIL. Yes, Diana?

DIANA. Never mind. Go on.

BASIL. Of course, we are every one of us fighting for the right! So is David. So is Rosie. We are all pillaging and butchering one another, in order to maintain civilization. Yes, but which? The civilization of the Kaiser and his gentle son? The civilization of Lord Northcliffe? The civilization of Siberia and Bloody Sunday? Of the Turkish harem, the Serbian bomb, Italian intrigue? Or a new civilization of all the workers of the world, pledged to dispossess these . . . .

You're a linguist, Diana. What's the word?

DIANA. There isn't one.

DAVID *makes an angry movement.*

BASIL. Yes, we know your word, David! David's word, David's book about these things, dominates the whole of Europe! Many books! White, yellow, grey, every color! What the world is waiting for is Diana's book, Diana's father's book, not David's! Some day, I suppose the peoples will arise and demand it, if they have to crack the chancelleries with sledge-hammers!

David. Humph! Violence, now!

Basil. Why not?—I'm a soldier! If I have hitherto shed blood for David's lie, why not, henceforward for Diana's truth? Deeply considered, perhaps this war does present just such an alternative. What is it, but the last great struggle between woman's world, that preserves and organizes and makes alive; and man's that makes destruction? There have been too many Davids managing affairs. Let's have Diana for a change.

David. What about carrying symbolism too far, now?

Basil. Don't you perceive, you pedantic ass, that I am speaking dramatically? Have you *no* imagination? Here am I, trying to uplift you from the slough of your own petty lives into a realm of pure *theoria*—That's the word, isn't it, Diana?—and you keep butting in with the trivial objections of a stockbroker.

David. Nevertheless, any invasion of my God-sanctioned rights in that book or anything else, I will resist with . . . .

Basil. Oh, come off it, Billy Strutabout! We really are a little sick of you! . . . .

It's this damned impenitence of heart that gets me! No sense of sin anywhere! No decent cleansing self-contempt! We are all so blatantly assured of our election! And we prove it by the number of dead things we pile around us! I suppose it's part of our disgusting religion! . . . .

He pauses a little, thinking deeply.

Come to that, I'm not unscathed! I have sinned more grievously than you all.

They look at him inquiringly.

If it were not for one thing . . . .

Diana. One thing— Yes? . . . .

He fixes her with a long curious gaze.

Rosie. What did you do, exactly?

He fixes her.

Basil. Exactly?

Rosie. Yes.

Basil. Murder.

Rosie. Murder! . . . .

Basil. Cold-blooded murder, too: that's the worst of it! No excuse in passion, for the deeds I did! I have slaughtered cynically, laughing like a sportsman, counting my bag. You, David, have falsified a great scholastic trust. I have destroyed past recovery the garnered learning of the ages. *You* have repudiated prospective motherhood. I have massacred sleeping babies.

Rosie. Murder! . . . .

David. He means militarism. That's this new-fangled pacifist way of talking.

Basil. Yes, the new way! You see, war doesn't look as beautiful to soldiers as it does to patriots. I say this, who have served it with the devotion of an anchorite. Yes, David's book tricked me: I have no cause to flout him. I have given to lies the energy and zeal that might have saved the world. If I had only stopped to puzzle out the meaning of these words they offered me!—Honor, national destiny, your country, and the rest of it. But no! They waved a flag before me, muttering the usual incantations, and I followed. I am a soldier: I have always followed flags! I am a soldier: I have never questioned anything! I am a soldier: I have never dared to disobey! Yes, David's old-fangled gospel of the Beast with the Horns of Blasphemy bound me long enough! . . . . A thousand years! . . . . But now, at last, I am free!

He pauses again, striving to remember something.

There was a word uttered the other day, a brave word, destined to become historic. It might very well be incorporated in your book, Diana. It's a woman's word, fearless, formidable; though spoken by a man. I should like to be associated with it now—in the days of its contempt and obloquy. *Too proud to fight.*

DAVID. And he's a soldier, mind you!

BASIL. Oh, there are many of us beginning to feel that way. There'll be more, by and bye. I'm tell you now, before it's popular.

ROSIE. I must say, your argument doesn't appeal to me! It wouldn't to any real woman! I like a man to be brave!

BASIL. Very well, we'll begin at home; and overturn *those* money-changers' tables!

ROSIE. I don't understand.

BASIL. *They* will! . . . . Well, Diana, have you any taunt to fling at my cowardly head?

DIANA. It is all so new, so strange, like a dream! You are not the Basil of those long ages ago, before the war. How did it happen?

BASIL. It was Something that came to me one day above the battlefield. Among the clouds. Something I saw.

DIANA. What?

BASIL. God.

They all stand perfectly still, staring at him.

I'll tell you about it, if you'd like to hear. Won't you all sit down?

They do so: BASIL *at the base of the altar;* DAVID *and* ROSIE *on the bench, left.* DIANA *remains where she is.*

It is near sundown. The sky is now a deep burning purple, shot with gold.

BASIL *tells his story very quietly, in an almost commonplace tone of voice:*

BASIL. It was in the early morning. I was told off to reconnoitre. We had suffered heavily during the night; but with the dawn, the cause of Heaven was vindicated once more. We cut them into mince-meat.

I wasn't feeling very fit that morning. Insomnia, fever, all that kind of thing. As I buckled myself in, a big black cloud came sweeping overhead. "Bit of wind on," I thought. "Perhaps blow some of these cobwebs away." And I nodded good-bye to the boys. "So long, old hawk!" said one of them; "Mind you don't hit Christ up there!" Somehow, the word stuck in my head. As I left earth, the birds were singing.

The first few thousand feet were fairly easy. A stray shot grazed me; but I didn't consider it serious, and I pressed on. Then suddenly—I struck that cyclone! The song of it through my rigging was like jangling harps.

A look of scared remembrance comes into his eyes.

It was alive. I felt the heave and bulging of its terrible body, I drank its breath, heard the roaring of its voices. I found myself imagining—eyes! . . . .

Then I got mad. I set myself to wrestle with that grim unseen antagonist, as though it were indeed some conscious soul. I suppose I grew light-headed. I began talking to him, challenging, deriding! "Come on, you devil! Come on, you Son of Thunder, and be pulverized!" Then, with a shift of fancy, came to me that scriptural name for God: *to Pneuma Hagion*—the Holy Wind! It tickled me immensely. The quip, the irony of it! And the cloud swooped down upon me.

You people don't know what it is to be lost in a cloud. The dark, the desolation! It's like disembodiment—in purgatory. You lose all bearings. Above, below, the usual distinctions don't mean anything. It's only when the things begin to fly *up* out of your pockets . . . . And not always then. There's that rush of blood to your head! There's madness, delirium! . . . . It seemed ages. Presently, a miracle happened, a flood of light! It was the cloud whisking away. And I saw the world upside down!

"That's funny," I said; "I always thought the sky went that way! Suppose it's all right! That's how it must look to God!—Everything turned about!" The paradoxes, the time-worn antinomies floated dimly through me. "Damned idiotic arrangement!" I muttered, and grew hideously calm.

He continues as in a dream. He seems almost to have forgotten their presence.

Then bit by bit, slowly, I became aware that I was not alone. He had circled around me several times, before I realized. I saw his flag first. It was the enemy's! . . . . I gazed at it stupidly, trying to collect myself. At last, I said: "Why, that's my enemy! There's the gutless dog that is destroying civilization!" And I emptied both my barrels into him. Then I grinned inanely, and looked into his face. It was the face of Christ! . . . .

When I woke, I was in the hospital. It was Maytime. Through the open window came a puff of wind, bearing a scent of blossoms. And the birds were still singing.

After a few moments, he rises and says quietly:

Now, do you understand?

The others rise also.

David. Only too well. If I divine you rightly, you forsake your vows as a soldier, your honor as a gentleman, your king, your flag, your country.

Basil. You divine me perfectly. I spit out of my mouth, the service of Caiaphas and Pilate forever! I am the man without a country! I have "accepted" Jesus.

He emphasizes the cant word, bringing out both ironies.

David. Do you believe in peace at any price?

Basil. Well, at the price of everything that *you* call honor.

Rosie. I'm with David, absolutely! I despise disloyalty! Oh, how I despise it!

Basil. And you, Diana?

Diana. I'm with you, Basil. I despise it, also.

Basil. Then, out of the way, you mountebanks and puppets of a dead and dying order! Clear the stage, for the biggest love-scene that was ever played on earth!

Diana. Love-scene! What do you mean?

BASIL. Between the New Woman, already in the world; and the New Warrior coming to her, as quickly as the devil and the European War will let him! I'll tell you all about it, Diana, as soon as we get these married people bundled out.

DIANA. No! No! I am unworthy! I am unworthy!

And she darts wildly into the garden, like a stricken deer.

BASIL. That's the second time she's dodged me today. If I had my plane, I'd fly to her! If I were Legge, I'd do it in a waltz! But—lame! . . . . There's a symbol in that too!
Well, Mrs. Fleming, Rosie—Let me call you Rosie!—Anything to say?

ROSIE. Nothing! Ever!

She minces disdainfully up the stairway. At the top, she turns:

I only hope you may get her!

And that is the end of ROSIE.

BASIL. You anything, David?

DAVID (*gruffly*). No!

He turns on his heel. BASIL *recalls him.*

BASIL. Oh, David! . . . . Just to satisfy one last flickering nationalistic interest. What *was* your mother?

DAVID. American. Came from Milwaukee.

And he follows ROSIE *proudly. It is like the passing of an emperor.*

It is sundown. The night is falling fast. ION *enters with a lighted lantern, which he places on the altar.*

BASIL. Ion! Where is she?

ION. Under the fig-tree. Weeping.

And without another word, BASIL *limps off.*

ION *looks around, to make sure the coast is clear. Then he whistles softly toward the cellar.* PROUT *emerges with his paraphernalia.*

ION. Did you find your worm?

PROUT. I have been strangely misled. This is no problem in polyandry at all. I find nothing more unusual in this ménage than paranoia, polymorphous perverse, introversion and dementia praecox. With two exceptions. The young man, Legge, I regard as a healthy, wholesome specimen of everything modern eugenical science might desire; and the suffrage woman is a fine example of an Œdipus Complex, stimulated by the demise of her late lamented archaeological Papa!

I won't stay dinner. I will go and communicate my discoveries to my friends in Zürich and Vienna.

He moves toward the villa, and stops.

No! Matrimony! Ugh! . . . .

He moves toward the garden, and stops.

Love! Ugh! . . . . Ah!

And he chooses LEGGE'S *way of the wall. He is already halfway over.*

ION. Take care!

PROUT. Why?

ION. It is a steep place, running down into the sea.

PROUT. Too late: I'm over!

And he is. A moment later, DIANA *and* BASIL *come panting in from the garden.* DIANA *takes the left of the altar, and faces* BASIL, *who is on the right. The lantern illumines them.*

BASIL. Diana! Diana!

DIANA. No! No!

A gun is heard from below.

What's that? . . . .

ION. Only the Harbor Master, telling: "All is well!"

He leaves them.

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Fourth Act.

THE FIFTH ACT

THE WAY OF THE TREE OF LIFE

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged: DIANA *and* BASIL *stand, one on each side of the Altar of the Mother of the Gods;* DIANA, *left;* BASIL, *right. The night has fallen; but* ION'S *lantern is there. And the moon is rising.*

BASIL. Diana, listen to me!

DIANA. I daren't! I daren't!

BASIL. Oh, Diana, you are wrecking me at the very moment of my freedom! Don't be selfish! Think of me! Remember that glorious outburst of passionate eloquence I poured into your ears down yonder! Speeches a playwright might have envied! And none but nightingales to hear me! Oh, these love-scenes that nobody ever witnessed! Think of the greatness of the thing I offer you, Diana! I'm not offering matrimony. I'm not insulting you! This is love! I'm simply asking you to live with me!

DIANA. Yes, I think I understand! Live with you!

BASIL. With you, near you, by you—anything: so long as I am within sight of your beautiful face, the sound of your adorable voice!—Oh, your voice! It isn't like a voice at all! It is like the memory of all the dreams and immortal longings of the ages! I want you for my friend, my comrade! As for matrimony, that evil protestant stew of smugness and bestiality, I abjure it! The Blessed Sacrament of Marriage, if you will! Some day! When I am worthy! When I have cleansed myself of—sex! When I am above it, beyond it, like the holy angels of God! But meanwhile, friend, comrade, fellow-worker in the fashioning of a new world! Diana, don't you know, that it is what the age is waking to? Can't you feel that all the winds of Heaven are driving us to this?

Diana. Yes, yes, I feel that too! I know we are on the threshold of the Great Miracle! A New World, so far as the relation between man and woman is concerned. A world of less sex and more love. There shall be real children in that world! Children with wings maybe: children of the open sky: maybe at last some Golden Child, quickened of the Wind Himself! Yes, yes, I see the beauty of it; and yet . . . .

Basil. You mean, perhaps, the blind sniggering multitude . . . . People like Rosie, like Legge . . . .

Diana. No, I'm not thinking of what people might say! It's myself!

Basil. Yourself? . . . .

Diana. Oh, how I have dreamed of this day! I have waited for it, all women have waited for it, down the centuries! I too, have heard the voices, seen the sign in the skies, have known the rushing of that Mighty Wind . . . . And yet, now that the Day is here, I am afraid!

Basil. Afraid! Of what?

Diana. The Thing before us! The Thing already standing at the door.

Basil. If you fear that perhaps again, after *this* war . . . . But no! This is the war that ends war.

Diana. War end war! If we depend upon war to end war, we are lost indeed! Already, the nations that began with that doctrine are singing *their* hymns of hate, planning trade reprisals, further armaments in the future. No! War, under all circumstances is abominable, blasphemous and obscene! It drags everything, everybody, into its pestilential vortex! It never breeds anything but war! It is the destroyer of everything decent and human!

BASIL. That is true. And yet, in war, I have seen heroisms, that . . . .

DIANA. Oh, don't mistake me! God knows, I do not wish to pluck one laurel from the sacred brows of those poor mangled victims yonder! Rather, I will add one. They were heroes before the war—most of them. Heroes in mine, in factory, in fetid slum! The same dastardly hand tortured them in both cases. Only without publicity, the first time. Those heroisms were ungazetted! No! War will end by the advent of Something mightier than itself! It is here, now! At the door!

BASIL. What?

DIANA. The Day! The coming of the Lord in clouds of glory! The millennium!

BASIL (*under his breath*). Diana! . . . .

DIANA. It may be already, the trumpets have sounded, for those that can hear: for those that can see, already the graves opened and given up their dead! One watches people's faces . . . . There is a strange light! One listens to the unsaid whisperings of their spirits . . . . It is a kind of Wind! And everywhere! Like a rustling among the leaves! A breathing out of the heart of the forest! . . . .
That is why I am afraid! I ask myself, am I ready?

BASIL. That is a terrible thought, Diana.

DIANA. It is a terrible moment in the history of the world.

BASIL. Am I ready? I ask myself that question, too.

DIANA. That preparedness is worth considering, isn't it, Basil? It goes deeper than their hell-fire, too! It's a little more important than saving your own soul!

BASIL. Yes, but you'd never get religious people to see that!

DIANA. Nevertheless, despite *their* infidelity, when He comes, He must find faith on the earth.

BASIL. It calls for a New Man!

DIANA. It calls for a New Woman!

BASIL. Not Superman! It must be Man of God's own making! Not man whose line goes back through ancient lusts and tyrannies to the ravening beast!

DIANA. Not Superwoman! But Woman, God's Helpmeet, whose line goes back through pangs and crucifixions, bearing the life and rapture of the coming day!

BASIL. Where shall we look for them?

DIANA. Perhaps we shall find them here. Among the Common People. Once they are set free.

BASIL. They must free themselves.

DIANA. Yes, we must free ourselves! And each other! We must free ourselves of all lies! Of the beast within, and the beast without! We must free ourselves of the despotisms, the nationalities, even the flags! We must free ourselves of everything, however reverend, that makes a lie!

BASIL. And then? In this broken world? . . . .

DIANA. Forgive one another! And bring forth anew!

BASIL. Have you any definite plans, Diana?

DIANA. No! They are in the hands of God. He will reveal them. We must follow the light. Are you ready, Basil?

BASIL. I am ready.

DIANA. Then—friend, comrade, beloved!

They join hands above the altar.

BASIL. Diana!

DIANA *mounts to the altar, and stands there like a priestess at the moment of some high sacrament.* BASIL *looks at her, then sinks quietly to the base at her feet.*

DIANA. There is something more beautiful than passion, Basil. There is bliss. Out of bliss come forth the deathless children of the spirit. It is the only secret of creation. The secret of great art, of social order, of a new world! Out of bliss, the Master Craftsman of the Universe makes all things. He, who knows the last word, ere He writes the first. He sees the action one, complete and of a certain magnitude. With an inner and an outer meaning, symbolical, instinct with paradox and irony leading deeply unto truth. Inspiring! Uplifting! Illuminating! And with cleansing in the end!

BASIL. Such bliss be ours. It *is* ours!

DIANA. Why then, our Golden Child is here! That gladness also goes to the making of this moment! It gives the assurance of the future in the present! And not only so! Of the past also! It makes all one! No longer will I mourn the dead! Those stricken brothers yonder! Rather will I sing and rejoice! Why, even now . . . . Any moment, any moment—in the twinkling of an eye . . . . Because I veritably believe . . . .

BASIL. Believe—what, Diana?

She looks at him curiously; and then, slowly, emphasizing every point, says:

DIANA. Because I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of *Life!* Who *spake* by the prophets! Because I believe in the *forgiveness* of sins! The *resurrection* of the body! And the Life everlasting! Amen!

The moonlight is upon them. There is heard the sound of nightingales in the garden; and a faint stirring of wind.

The curtain falls. It is the end of the play.

THE ARMY WITH BANNERS

A DIVINE COMEDY OF THIS VERY DAY SETTING FORTH IN SIGNIFICANT FORM BY THE AID OF SEVEN PLAYERS THE STORY OF A MORNING IN THE EARLY MILLENNIUM

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners?—Song of Solomon

THE ARMY WITH BANNERS was written during the summer of 1917; and, no theatrical management being interested in peace propaganda just then, it was produced by the author and his wife at their own expense, for a few weeks' run, commencing April 9, 1918, at the Garrick Theatre, New York City.

It was first issued in book form by Mr. B. W. Huebsch, New York, October, 1919.

THE ARMY WITH BANNERS

THE ARMY WITH BANNERS is a Divine Comedy of This Very Day, setting forth in Significant Form, by the aid of Seven Players, the Story of a Morning in the Early Millennium.

THE TIME is at the Coming of the Lord.

THE PLACE is the Hall of a Gothic Building of the Thirteenth Century, formerly a Nunnery, now converted into an Orphanage. Below, it is bathed in clear but sunless daylight, the vaultings above losing themselves in palpitating shadows. On the left is a mullioned window, looking east. At the back are two pointed doors. The westerly one leads to the scullery and kitchens; the easterly, to the refectory. Between them a broad stone stairway ascends to a gallery, dominated by a lofty stained-glass window, representing the Angel of the Resurrection in somber amber lights. Exits may be made from both sides of the gallery. On the right is a gaunt fireplace, the fire being lighted.

A LECTERN, guarded by two tall candelabra and provided with a Bible, stands by the eastern pillar of the stairway. Of other furniture there is little. A carved table in the window; upon it, an alms-dish and a bowl of roses. A chair near the middle of the hall. Above the fireplace a high-backed bench; below it, a faldstool. All of these are in strict thirteenth century. Only one really modern note may be found in the place. It stands by the western pillar of the stairway, opposite the Bible. It is a Talking Machine.

THE PERSONS represented are Mary Bliss, a poor fool; Julia Manners, a lady of good motives; Job Limp, a man of the past; Timothy Hodge, a man of the present; Tommy Trail, a man of the minute; Pomeroy Wragg, a man of almost any time; and Dafty, a man out of time altogether.

THE FIRST ACT

As the curtain rises, the Hall is empty. The laughter of children sounds from a distant part of the Orphanage. A clock strikes nine, and silence ensues.

The two doors fly open simultaneously. TIMOTHY HODGE *appears from the Refectory; from the Scullery,* JOB LIMP. TIMOTHY *is corpulent and pasty, with red hair and an acquiescent smirk;* JOB, *scrag, with a bitter eye. They are dressed accordingly; and belong in their respective ways to the loftier classes.*

They hurry forward, and bump in the middle of the hall.

LIMP. Extravagance! Did *you* find anything?

HODGE. The entire Orphanage got up like one of them Catholic carnivals. Advent Sunday, they said. And the kids all coming in from Mass. Mass, mind you! And then we call ourselves a decent Protestant country.

LIMP. It's this everlasting pampering.

HODGE. It's popery.

LIMP. The woman's a fool. And *he's* the devil himself.

He gestures savagely toward the Scullery.

Did you see her?

HODGE. What! Let her nab hold of me alone, before you others . . . . Not much! You know what she is.

This provokes LIMP *to a bitter snort.*

Course, I believe in the higher education, myself. Didn't I build the Baptist Young People's Self-Improvement Institution? Only, it don't all seem proper to me, somehow. Did you see *him?*

LIMP. Him! He's off gallivanting with the little girls. But his hoofprint's everywhere. I thought that cryptic paranoiac was engaged to shovel coal!

HODGE (*quoting*). "Stoke the furnace, and do what's wanted down below." I was by, when she made the contract. And too well paid at that.

LIMP. Well, he's cook now! That, added to the rest of the tomfooleries. Made them cakes!

HODGE. Seems sinful, don't it? And all this want in the world. Good cakes, as might have been given to the poor. The deserving poor.

LIMP *grunts aggrievedly.*

It's not even as if they paid their whack. After all, it's a charity, and ought to be run as such. But she never would listen to me.

LIMP. There was one, a mountainous macaroon with a slab of ice on it . . . . I can see it now. Ugh! And me with a liver.

HODGE. Awful!

LIMP. Awful! It's torments of the damned! . . . . Did I ever tell you about my liver, Timothy?

HODGE. You did, Job. Regular, the last seven years.

And he eyes him firmly.

Funny thing, never had a liver. But we all have our troubles. Mine's fatty degeneration of the heart. Doctor says I'll go, that way, sometime.

This does not really comfort Job. *He moves irritably to the fireplace.*

Limp. I wish you wouldn't be forever contemplating tombs.

Hodge. We got to die, Job.

Limp (*sneering*). "There is no death!" Ask *her.*

Hodge. *I* ain't responsible for her profanity. You'd better blame that window. That's what's addled *her* brain. Twisting Scripture!

He turns reproachfully toward the window.

Don't look like no Angel of the Resurrection, neither. Looks to me, more like one of them new-fangled cover designs.

He straddles the chair and faces Limp, *who has his back to the fire.*

It's all this thirteenth century falderal. Moment Nicholas Biggs left her the money, I knew what it would be. I did *my* best. But no! *Orphanage!* So she buys this ramshackle old has-been. If she'd invested in my Lucifer Power and Light Company, as you others did, by today she'd have been a Rockyfeller. I don't recall the exact present market-price of Gothic nunneries; but *you* know what Lucifers been doing since the war. Besides the patriotism! Investing with me would have served the two most improving principles of the hour: Business As Usual and Doing Your Bit.

He bites his knuckle meditatively. The action points to an acquisitive infancy.

Limp. If she'd only had the taste to make it a museum!

HODGE. Or else the gumption to run it as a ruin. Simply wanted a turnstile and a man at fifteen per. No! "Education! Let us resume from where we halted in thirteen something!" Course, education's—needed. My young Baptists now, I suppose you'd call them educated. They don't dance, they don't drink, they don't go to theayters, don't do anything!—What more do you want? And I make out of it! . . . .

He discovers a nice wart behind his ear.

If the place paid! If it was only one of them high-priced schools, where the little girls run around in automobiles and the little boys play golf all day! But orphans! *Penniless* orphans! Not even orphans, some of them! There are children in this establishment today who have healthy well-fed parents walking the earth. I taxed her with that once. Know what she said? "They'll all be walking, presently." That was the very first time I noticed she was going peculiar in her head.

LIMP. Peculiar! It's dementia praecox!

HODGE. Then, the things she's teaching them! My young people would be shocked. Forms and ceremonies and play-acting and sex hygiene, you'd think they was so many grown-up married men and women, the unpleasant things they know. Have you seen their Greek dancing?—I have! And they do it openly, brazenly! I don't know how you think; but I know how I was brought up to consider little girls' legs. And of course, since *he's* come . . . . ! I may be only a plain God-fearing man of business; but I hope I represent the spirit of an enlightened Protestant age. And I tell you, it hurts my inside to see so much good money, sort of—getting away.

And he is back at his mouth once more.

Limp. It isn't the thirteenth century. It's this modern—levelling. Socialism! And humoring indigent brats with macaroons.

Hodge. I'm against socialism, myself. It destroys incentive.

Limp. Mediaevalism's all right in its proper place: the past. Something to escape to, from the loathsome present. But why resuscitate it for a crèche of undiscerning sucklings? Can they grasp symbolism, grotesquerie, the gargoyle? Can they grasp the creative technicalities of such works as Dante's *Inferno?* No! I can. I've a liver.

And he indicates that organ, feelingly.

Hodge. You remind me of corpses. Some people would travel long weary miles for a corpse. I don't mean merely clergymen and undertakers. Grandmothers, aunts, next-door neighbors, people of that sort. My mother loved them. Course, corpses have their uses, same as—ourselves; but as you say, why resuscitate? End of the world and all that, yes! Only, I mean—actually. Nice lot of dummies we'd look, wouldn't we, if all the graveyards was suddenly to . . . .

Limp (*explosively*). Look here, Timothy! Do you propose chirruping your charnel fancies the whole morning?

Hodge regards him with melancholy displeasure.

Hodge. Ain't you got *no* higher nature, Job? Don't be liverish. Have a heart.

He claps his hand rememberingly to his own. His intended diagnosis, however, is prevented by the tumultuous appearance of Pomeroy Wragg *from the Refectory. He is blown in, as it were, upon gales of childish glee.*

POMEROY *is a small old man, spick and span, now bespattered with confectionery. He is in funeral garb, wears national emblems in his lapel, and seems perturbed.*

WRAGG. The poisonous young reptiles! This comes of Magna Charta! This comes of granting popular liberties! Give them a taste of *genuine* feudalism, say I! Racks, tortures, thumb-screws! Look at me!

HODGE. Well, you do look a mug. What have they done?

WRAGG. Done! Plastered me up with cake and banana skin, and all the filthy leavings of their gluttonous young mouths.

LIMP. The little swine! Why?

WRAGG. Because, like a babbling bivalve, I cast my pearls before them. *You* know my platform. *You* know the priceless gems I'm bawling night and day into the flapping ears of every ass I meet. I gave them all. And they plastered me with offal.

HODGE. Signifying disagreement?

WRAGG. Disagreement! Worse!

LIMP. Contempt?

WRAGG. Worse! They took me for a funny man, and hugged me!

The others reply incredulously:

BOTH. No! . . . .

WRAGG. I tell you, they did! I can feel their sticky kisses all over me. Then they romped me up and down, and made me this disgusting mess. Dressed for the Memorial Service, too! If ever this leaks out, I'm lost. Let people once get it into their heads I'm funny; and I shall perish from the earth. Look at me!

He gyrates. Upon his back is pinned a paper, bearing the legend in a large scrawling hand: MISTER WRAGG IS A WAGG.

HODGE (*laughing*). Well, that's funny!

WRAGG (*turning furiously*). What's funny?

LIMP (*testily*). On your back, man! On your back!

He unpins and gives him the paper.

WRAGG. That's that little devil in yellow, who wanted me to play pickaback! (*spitefully*); I suppose she thinks that's poetry!

HODGE. Here, save them pins. I wouldn't be the man I am today, if I hadn't saved pins.

LIMP *hands them to him. He sticks them lovingly in his waistcoat edge.*

WRAGG. This comes of helping friends! Pulling us out of our comfortable Sunday beds to play peepbo! Has anyone *seen* Julia? She planned this conspiracy.

HODGE. We ain't seen Julia, nor *her*. And we been poking about since eight. Job in the kitchen: me in the refectory.

LIMP. Picked up a few choice titbits, too! *I* did. I don't know what Timothy . . . .

But TIMOTHY *muses upon some problem of his own.*

HODGE. Them poor-boxes in the refectory, as the kids put their pennies in, ain't no good. You can poke them out with your knife, as easy as easy.

WRAGG. Well, we must await Julia's pleasure; that's all!

LIMP. Yes, and supposing *she* turns up! Nice catastrophe *we'd* bring about, and no Julia behind us!

WRAGG. We must talk her down!

LIMP. Mary Bliss!

He glooms ironically, as Pluto might upon the bootless dreams of Sisyphos.

HODGE. Here's Julia.

JULIA MANNERS *trips briskly down the stairway. She is a widow of means, dressed elegantly but severely in plum-colored silk.*

JULIA. Everybody here? Charming! Have they sent the talking machine?—We'll want that. Ah! Opposite the Bible! Most appropriate!

She joins them. They gather around her.

I've been up in her room, alone, rummaging through her things. Now, Job, don't get punctilious: our plot necessitates it. I will say one thing for her—she's orderly. You know, that crafty kind of orderliness, covering an oblique mind.

Have *you* obtained anything?

She happens to glance at HODGE, *who takes the inquiry personally.*

HODGE. Me? Nothing to speak of.

JULIA. *I have!* I've discovered everything. It confirms our vilest suspicions.

HODGE. About her?

LIMP. About him?

JULIA. About both of them. It's perfectly unspeakable: I'll tell you all about it at once. Let's sit down and be comfortable.

They do so. JULIA, *in the middle of the high-backed bench;* LIMP, *on her left.* WRAGG *takes the faldstool, below the fire.* HODGE, *the chair.*

LIMP. Looks as if we were going to get somewhere at last.

The others "shush" him down.

JULIA. I always knew that Mary Bliss was a fool. Her educational theories prove that. And it was I, remember, first drew attention to her queer mental . . . . Well, today's revelation caps everything! Though really, if I hadn't been a born innocent, I should have guessed that too! For all the town talks of it! . . . . Listen! I've been reading her diary.

LIMP. What! . . . .

JULIA. Yes, I'm aware it isn't done: you needn't tell me that! After all, it's the motive! . . . . Look here, I can't proceed with my story, if you keep on impugning my honor in this ungentlemanly way. Timothy understands. Don't you, Tim?

HODGE (*complaisantly*). Oh, yes.

JULIA. There, you see! We can't stand selfishly by, and watch that creature pass to perdition, without *some* help.

We must save her from herself: we're her friends. Well, *aren't* we?

OMNES (*vociferously*). Oh, yes! Yes!

JULIA. Then, doesn't that show? As I say, it's the intention. Even God searches our hearts. Isn't that a kind of reading diaries?

And, divinely fortified, she drops to the confidential:

My dears, it's practically a confession. Every single wickedness set down in barefaced black and white. As for *him!* I had my misgivings before; but now I could tell you a pretty thing or two! The trickster has her completely under his thumb.

WRAGG. Dafty?

JULIA. Dafty.

HODGE. What's his real name, I wonder?

JULIA. Timothy, what *does* it matter? Who cares about the real name of a brute that stokes furnaces? Though no doubt he has diabolically deep reasons for concealment!

HODGE. It's that sleepy look of his! Sort of—crocodile.

JULIA. Sleepy! He's as wide awake as . . . .

LIMP. Can't imagine what she sees in the scoundrel!

JULIA (*pityingly*). My dear Job! Don't you know, persons like Dafty only have to dress peculiarly, and cultivate a few eccentricities, for every misguided woman in the world to jump at them? That's what they do: jump! The children, too. That little yellow thing especially.

HODGE. Course, it's plain, what he's after!

He taps his pocket. Coins are heard clinking.

JULIA. Precisely our motive for stepping in. Nicholas Biggs only left her the money in one of his cranks, ghastly old fiend! If her friends won't look after it, who will? It's our sacred duty! We owe it to the dead! She shall *not* squander it on worthless outsiders! Worming in!

HODGE. It's her immortal soul, I'm thinking of!

JULIA. Exactly! We must remember that, too. After all, if we do read diaries, we are bringing her the consolations of religion. Else, why did I send the talking machine?

LIMP. Well, why?

JULIA (*mysteriously*). I'm reserving that. Timothy, see if the record's there.

He rises heavily to do so; but WRAGG'S *next utterance diverts him.*

WRAGG. Queer old stick, Nicholas! Clever as the deuce! Billions, out of manufacturing optical instruments!

HODGE. Dead wrong! It was monster enterprise, bold investment, made him. Till he began smashing telescopes.

WRAGG. I never heard that.

HODGE. There's not many as knows. Kept dark! Business!

He compresses his lips with the profound inscrutability of the man of affairs. LIMP *soon pricks that bubble.*

LIMP. No mystery! Everybody knows it was religious mania! Runs through the whole family: either *her* way, or old Nick's! *She* flies off into erotic mysticism and esoteric orphanages: *he*, after a perfectly brilliant financial career, suddenly declares himself a damned spirit, hacks his observatory to smithereens, and goes gibbering into limbo under the hallucination that the sky is an Enormous Eye.

JULIA. Enormous . . . . How horrible!

WRAGG. Ever see him?

LIMP. Nobody did. But his influence was unfathomable. Wherever any scheming of transcendent magnitude was afoot, you might be sure, deep down, abysmally, under one pseudonym or another, old . . . .

HODGE. Ssh! Dafty! . . . .

This, he delivers in a stentorian stage whisper.

DAFTY *enters from the Scullery with a log. He is a quaint soul in goggles, shambling of gait and bent, a whimsical twinkle in his eye; and rather nobbishly clad in buff nankeens with buttoned gaiters and a brimstone vest.*

He places the log on the fire, beams affably upon the company, and remarks:

DAFTY. Weather, we're having! And thunder brewing!

They stiffen, making no reply. Nothing daunted, he tries a crack with WRAGG:

Fond of their bit of fun! That Golden One, now! Quite a poet, I must say. And only seven!

WRAGG *pokes vigorously at the fire.* DAFTY *watches amiably, with an air of heartening the* *well-meant bungling of an amateur. He then spreads further radiance, ostensibly addressing the Gothic arches above him.*

They enjoyed their macaroon. I must have that recorded in the diary.

The others focus LIMP *and* JULIA *in turn, as they register these trifles.*

And DAFTY *makes for his den. On his journey, he bethinks him of another word; and with a glint at* HODGE, *produces from his vest, a coin.*

Can any of you kind friends break me this?

HODGE *can. The others will see him in the nether gulf first.*

HODGE. I can give you pennies.

DAFTY. Thank you. Pennies will do nicely.

He regards him slumberously, an air of the Nile about him.

The transaction is made. HODGE *bites the silver to test it. He then tickles the crook of his mouth with his forefinger, making a secretive broker's jib.* DAFTY *studies the action heedfully, and imitates it. This done, he shuffles toward the Scullery.*

But JULIA *can restrain herself no longer.*

JULIA. You! Stoker!

DAFTY. Ma'am?

And he pops his head round the back of the bench.

JULIA. Have you any earthly inkling of what decent godly people mean by morality?

DAFTY (*chuckling*). Bless your heart, yes, ma'am! Means making yourself disagreeable to the indecent devilish ones. Only, don't bother your head, ma'am: you get over it! I was moral myself once. But I learned a game worth dozens of it. I'll tell you all about it some day, when you and I . . . . (*winking*). You know! Sweet by and bye!

JULIA. Thank you, I am not desirous of learning.

HODGE. I see what's wrong with this fellow. He's one of these word-cubists. You know, calls black white; and twists things inside out. Job, you're a scholar: what's the name of that thing they do?

LIMP (*snapping*). Paradox!

HODGE. Thought so! You see, it'll be anarchy next, and free love, and got no religion.

DAFTY (*cunningly*). Yes, I have, too!

JULIA. You! Religious!

DAFTY. Yes, ma'am, damnably! Only, don't tell anybody. The moment you profess religion, you're put down for something serious at once; and all your little jokes go for nothing. I'm considered quite a funny man, so long as people don't imagine me religious. Only whack them over the back with a scourge: they split with laughter!—They never dream of apostolic function. Another thing!—Keeping mum staves off the saved. I've had whole Sunday Schools jigging around me, just because some busybody blurted. And it's useless informing them, their god's a Zulu's devil; and their revivalism stinks to heaven. They never see the joke. They yell out halleluiah, and take your name in vain, and pump you by the hand: till you wish yourself in hell, for a spice of solid home-comfort and congeniality. Mind you, I believe God's love is infinite. There is salvation for all—even the saved; if only they'll repent, and demolish a few big tabernacles. Why, I knew a Methodist once, who had been saved fifteen times; but the Lord found him at last, and now he's quite an honest member of society—a low comedian.

Meantime, his hearers have risen to sublime aloofness. They would not hearken to the bellowings of Apollyon. Now, however, they begin to descend rapidly:

You see, it's all a matter of eyesight. You can't get good eyes out of bad spectacles. That master optician, my good friend, Roger Bacon, in this very thirteenth century, knew that. Then again: take telescopes! An instrument can be made with power enough to reach beyond the stars. But it's no heavenly use to a blind man. He only has to learn that it exists, to be misled. Better smash it altogether and have done! You know those colored flames and flickers, when you press your eyeballs? Well, his poor black mind gets lost in *them;* and he fancies he beholds the shining of the Seven Fiery Spirits that burn about the Great White Throne.

LIMP (*bitingly*). What do you know about it?

DAFTY (*seraphically*). Ah, that's the funniest joke of all. I have seen those Spirits.

JULIA. That's enough infidelity, stoker! You can go.

DAFTY (*ruefully*). Wish my jokes could! Seems to be no place for really delicate humor nowadays.

And he seeks the coaly comfort of his underworld. Alone, at last, they let loose their pent-up feelings.

Julia. And that's the influence she deems desirable for children!

Limp. If he'd only be contented with that Stygian pit, unto which it has pleased the Unknowable to call him! But he comes up! He gallivants! He cooks!

Wragg. He plays the fiddle, while those young imps jig!

Hodge. I've seen him caper like an old he-goat, himself! He took off Satan in their pageant! Togged up and hollered like an actor!

Limp. He makes them fireworks! They tell him all their beastly little secrets. He kisses the girls!

Julia. And sows within their minds the tares of sin and irreligion!

Hodge. Something must be done!

Wragg. Something drastic!

Limp. Something excruciating!

Hodge. Something really nasty!

Julia. Precisely! That's why we're here. Now, listen.

They bank their fires. They divine she has something subterranean to impart. She has.

We must try to save her first. It wouldn't be quite kind to condemn her, if we didn't try to save her first. *Then*, if she's obstinate—as she will be!—there's the diary. As I say, we're her friends, and have every right to behave as such. So that's settled. And we can begin saving.

I have everything ready. The talking machine, the hymn books, even the collection plate. And *he'll* be here within the hour.

Omnes. Who?

Julia. Ah! . . . .

She now springs her trump card.

Tommy Trail!

Omnes. *Who!* . . . .

Julia. Tommy Trail.

Wragg. You'll never get him.

Julia. I have.

Hodge. You're a miracle! Tommy demands gold mines!

Julia. He does. Then there was the bracelet for Mother, and Johnny's little diamond pin; but I thought if we all chipped in . . . . And it's really an investment, rightly considered. Besides saving her soul!

What do you say, Pomeroy? You've been speaking on the same platform with him lately.

Wragg. I say, Tommy Trail is the biggest patriotic bonanza booming today. That man, with a flag and a hymn, can do more for recruiting in four minutes, than the whole of Pentecost.

Julia. What power! I do hope his voice . . . .

Wragg. That's no matter! When his voice croaks, he gets there with gesticulation. I've known him gnaw the pulpit before today.

Julia. What inspiration!

Wragg. *Doctrine*, a bit crude . . . .

Julia. Ah, but then he's so sincere!

Limp. So's a homicidal maniac! American, isn't he?

WRAGG. Distinctly: representatively! Emerson was one sort. He's another.

LIMP. Well, he won't get anything out of me. I hate his methods.

JULIA. My dear Job, he reaches people you and I wouldn't touch! Really horrid low-class people, you know!

LIMP. Julia, his language! . . . .

JULIA. How absurd you are! The man was brought up on a football field! You can't expect a man brought up on a football field, to talk like Ruskin!

LIMP. Yes, but his god—his disagreeable god! . . . .

JULIA. Now, Job! You can't go judging everybody by his god! Do be charitable!

HODGE. Look at the theayters he's closed! The good beer he's had wasted!

WRAGG. Look at that last sermon, *Render unto Cæsar!* Thousands rallied to the standard of civilization!

HODGE. And the one before, as broke the strike in my own industry! That was, *Suffer, little children.*

JULIA. Then his influence in the Happy Home! I know an auctioneer, a church deacon, who forsook his wife. Now, instead of playing cards with low companions, he sings hymns to *her*.

HODGE. In Tommy, you get all the high-class fun of Sarah Bernhardt and Charlie Chaplin knocked into one, without the wickedness. He's one of the elect all right, is Tommy! Oil of salvation regular oozes from him! The very unions believe and tremble when he comes! *He* makes the worker content with his wages! How? Offers the blighter heaven: if he refuses—gives him hell.

LIMP. Yes, hell and Tommy!

JULIA. Job, do remember you are a gentleman! . . . . Oh, she'll be here directly, and he'll spoil everything! . . . . Tommy has been taken up by people quite as good as you! People of the highest rank! The Colorado-Grubbs!

LIMP. Humph!

JULIA (*sharply*). What's that?

LIMP. My opinion of the Colorado-Grubbs! Humph!

JULIA. Well, so long as you confine yourself to remarks like that, when she . . . . Ah! . . . .

> *A thin high voice is heard above, quavering* "Lead, kindly Light."

Remember! Salvation first. When she refuses . . . .

HODGE (*histrionically*). And humor her!

> *His whisper wakes the age-long silence of the loftiest vaults above.*

JULIA. Ssh!

> *And they all sit rigid with anticipation.*

> MISS BLISS *appears from the right, tottering down the stairway by aid of a cane. She is an old woman of seventy-five, dressed daintily in dove-gray with a white cashmere shawl and a chantilly lace cap. Her snowy hair is arranged in side curls close to the temples with combs. She wears gold spectacles; and carries over her arm a*

large workbag, embroidered with a mediaeval device.

They rise to meet her. She commences talking at the top of the stairs, and continues doing so, all the way down.

BLISS. Well, well, well! First Advent Sunday, with its blessed message of expectation! And now this beautiful unexpected visitation of nice kind friends. Well, well! And then they say there are no miracles! . . . . What is it? A symposium, or a conspiracy?

There is an awkward pause. Then JULIA *answers with effusive pleasantry.*

JULIA. Oh, a conspiracy, Miss Bliss!

BLISS. Well, well, that is as it should be. Conspiracy: a breathing together. It reminds me of that Great Breathing, when . . . . And even now, it may be—at almost any moment . . . . Don't you feel something in the air? A kind of trembling!

She puts forth a quivering little palsied hand.

And then, my Angel! Is he not perhaps a trifle more golden?

She turns toward her beloved window.

HODGE. Well, I don't know as . . . .

JULIA (*quickly*). Why, certainly! Distinctly yellower! (*Under her breath*) Old fool! . . . . Let me help you, Miss Bliss.

And she juts out a succoring arm.

BLISS. No, no, thank you. I can do very nicely. Only, the stairs are just a wee mite steeper than . . . . Oh, but I must not say that! It is unbelieving.

By this time, she has joined them below.

So, here we all are! How radiant you appear! I cannot shake hands, because my poor old . . . .

She flushes, and changes the subject quickly.

Oh, such a naughty old woman, I am! You look so good and sweet, you three boys, I'd like to kiss you! But I must behave: I have just come from Early Celebration. There! Julia, for the company of you.

She kisses JULIA *with divine tenderness.* JULIA, *responding, pecks the air.*

I always did like kissing. It is such a pretty ceremony. Kind of a sacrament! Of course, there was Judas, poor thing; but He . . . . And the children are darlings! They have such little clean faces!

HODGE. Kissing ain't improper, when . . . .

BLISS. Yes, I saw you, Timothy! But you really mustn't! She was the merriest maid I ever had.

Flabbergasted, he brings his fist down on the back of the chair. She mistakes his meaning.

No, I won't sit, thank you. They are awaiting my morning word. Stay the whole day, all of you. There is to be Greek dancing. And at eleven o'clock, as it's Advent Sunday, they are donning their new white robes, and are to do their Pageant of the Second Coming. Dafty will play an archangel! Yes, is he not a genius? You will enjoy the dancing, Timothy. You always watch it so interestedly.

His expression escapes her, for she is busy bringing forth treasure from her workbag. It is a small white robe.

Look! The very last of all! I finished it this morning at my meditations. It is the Golden Child's. Hers had to be last, of course; because she is the firstling of my heart. And the first shall be last, you know.

WRAGG. Is that child, the little yellow . . . .

JULIA. With the big eyes that . . . .

HODGE. And the legs as . . . .

BLISS (*radiant*). That's the one!—You see, they all know her. Such a frolicsome tot! She writes poetry, too. And her laughter! It is like the bark of a little happy dog! . . . . Oh, how remiss I am! Pomeroy, I never thanked you for the flag. He gave me a beautiful big flag for the chapel. I put it with all the other flags, friends' and foes' alike, by the altar of our Lady of Mercy. They look so sweet and neighborly there together.

WRAGG. You put our flag with the enemy's!

BLISS. Assuredly! They might not think we loved them, otherwise.

And do you see? These embroidered slits are for the wings.

LIMP. Humph!

JULIA. Er—wings? . . . .

BLISS. Yes, when they come, you know. Oh, I tell you, that is the most important point of all. Dafty examines her tiny shoulder blades every morning, to see whether the pin feathers are showing. And look at this. A little Golden Heart, for Him to know her by.

Julia. Him! Whom?

Bliss (*reproachfully*). Julia! Aren't we all expecting Somebody?

Julia. *We* are! I don't see how *you* . . . .

Bliss. Indeed, I am! I am not as faithless as I seem. I look for His coming, in the quickening dawn of each unfolding moment.

Julia. But you can't possibly! His coming is only known to . . . .

Bliss. Yes, I remember that, too. "Neither the day nor the hour." But that only means that we must be ready for Him, *every* hour. Well, I must be toddling. The children . . . . Oh, how forgetful of me! That was dear of you, Julia, so dear of you: reading my diary.

Julia (*aghast*). What! I! . . . .

Bliss. Yes, I was above you, in the oratory, meditating. I hadn't the heart to disturb you: you were so happy. So I —meditated. Didn't you enjoy that bit about the Golden Child pulling Dafty into the pantry, and telling him solemnly that she loved him? Affectionate little . . . .

But suddenly, she sees Julia's *face.*

Oh, you are hurt! You think I was uncompanionable, not coming down to share your pleasure. Not if you knew my heart, Julia. Forgive me.

Julia. Do you mean, you—don't care?

Bliss. Care! You have a child, too. And then, we have broken bread together.

Julia. But your private papers? . . . .

Bliss. Private! Among friends? "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed"; you know that. And when it is Julia . . . .

Julia interrupts her with a nervous laugh.

Julia. Of course, so long as you don't misunderstand my motive . . . .

Bliss. There is no misunderstanding, where there is love, Julia. We mothers know that!

Julia (*faintly*). Job! . . . .

Limp. Don't appeal to me! I'm no mother! Never had the slightest desire to be one in my life!

His manner electrifies the atmosphere for a moment. Then Miss Bliss *sees. It is a joke.*

Bliss (*chuckling*). I know why you say that! Because you are a man! You cannot be a mother! Of course, you can't. Of course not! . . . . Well, I must go.

She makes for the Refectory. Half way there, she sees the talking machine on her right.

Bless my heart! What is this?

And she totters toward it.

Hodge. Talking machine.

Bliss. Talking machine? . . . .

She examines it more closely.

Do you have to put a penny into it?

Hodge. There'll be more than a penny put in that machine, before we've done!

Bliss. I suppose you turn a handle, or do something to it, and it goes on talking.

Hodge. That's the notion.

Bliss. How very clever of it! Very clever, indeed!

She leaves it, takes a glance around her Gothic Hall, and then looks back at the machine, saying with a certain reserve:

Yes!

And resumes her interrupted journey.

Well, well, I must administer their morning word. Make yourselves comfortable. (*Chuckling.*) Ah, Job! Of course, you can't! Of course, you can't.

Which brings her to the Refectory door.

Julia (*tensely*). Miss Bliss!

Bliss (*mildly*). Yes, Julia?

Julia. Since you know so much, I suppose you understand he is coming here this morning.

Bliss (*blankly*). He! Who? . . . .

Julia (*sharply*). Who! Aren't we expecting . . . .

Bliss (*flaming*). Do you mean—*Him!* . . . .

Her trembling hands involuntarily lift themselves toward heaven.

Who told you?

Julia. He sent me word by special messenger last night.

Bliss. Oh, Word Immaculate! Oh, Blessed Messenger!

She stands rapt, transfigured.

I must go and put them into their little white robes at once.

And she passes quickly through the doorway.

LIMP. Here's a tangle!

JULIA. It's the deceit enrages me! The underhanded spying hypocrisy! And there's an irony, a cunning low-down irony, echoing through her every word!

LIMP. *An* irony! It's triple-fugued!

HODGE. Did you hear about that altar? Virgin Mary, that means! My young people would fall flat dead!

WRAGG. And that bit about the flag?

JULIA. And the indecent reference to mothers?

LIMP. Well, what's your next bright act in this hilarious comedy?

JULIA. The diary! I'll unmask her sins, if it takes till Crack of Doom! Let us read it together! We have ages: I know her morning word! Quick! Prepare for his coming! Then, the offer of heaven first! If she refuses . . . .

She pauses for breath. HODGE *and* WRAGG *mistake it for a cue.*

BOTH. Give her hell!

JULIA. Exactly! Come!

And they rat up the stairway in single file.

LIMP. Damn it, they can't be permitted to carry off a thing like that! It's not done! Julia! Oh, the devil!

And he follows, fuming, fondling his liver.

As he vanishes, the two doors fly open simultaneously. From the Refectory appears MISS BLISS: DAFTY, *from the Scullery. They hurry forward, meeting in the middle of the Hall.*

BLISS. Dafty! It exhales, it emanates! It is in the air!

DAFTY. There is certainly something in the air!

BLISS. Doesn't your heart beat faster? Don't you feel yourself growing younger every moment?

DAFTY. Younger! I'm a rollicking cherub!

And they both give a little skip.

BLISS. The fields are ripe with the harvest! No more November: it is high summer! There goes my shawl!

DAFTY. And, dang it, there goes the crook out of my back!

He stiffens up laboriously.

BLISS. Whip off your spectacles, man!

He does, and pockets them. She does, hers; placing them on the lectern.

Oh, you are beautiful! You are young and glorious, as the wakening spring!

DAFTY. You are the flower and loveliness of all the blossoming Mays!

BLISS. Quick! We must make ready! I will array me for the Bridegroom in my virgin robes! Look! I relinquish every earthly prop! He is coming! He is coming!

She casts aside her cane; and her little pathetic hands wavering uncertainly in the air, she begins hobbling up the stairway.

DAFTY. He is! He is! But who? . . . . .

She turns in ecstasy, crying triumphantly;

BLISS. Who but the very Lord of Glory, to awake the slumbering dead!

And with accelerating flight, she flutters up and away to her room.

The shawl is left on the table by the eastern window: the cane, on the floor, at the bottom of the stairs.

DAFTY, *left alone, does a little gambol.*

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the First Act.

THE SECOND ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. DAFTY'S *gambol outgrows itself. It becomes delirious, pythonic, tarantulous. As he whirls and swiftly darts from side to side, his brimstone vest wavers like licking fire.*

Altercations are heard above. His rhythms falter to a hircine frisk. And WRAGG, LIMP, HODGE, *and* JULIA *appear flurrying down the stairway.*

LIMP. Utterly humiliated! *Your* brilliant craftsmanship, Julia!

JULIA. How was I to know she'd come sneaking back?

WRAGG. Didn't even frame a decent diplomatic explanation!

JULIA. You can't diplomatize, and the goods in your hand!

HODGE. I offered my pocket!

JULIA. Yes, like a bull of Bashan! . . . . Oh, do stop! She's perfectly complaisant! Making such an ill-bred fuss! Well! What demoniac seizure . . . .

For, at this moment, DAFTY *waltzes from behind the Bible into view.*

DAFTY. Salvation! He is coming! He is coming!

And, executing a pirouette, he hops to his hole.

JULIA. Everybody knows! It's Doomsday! I shall expect the secrets of my heart to be spread abroad next!

She walks agitatedly to the fireplace, followed by LIMP. WRAGG *squats dolefully on the bottom stair,* HODGE *standing by him.*

WRAGG. Why did she want to change her dress? She's dressed once today.

JULIA. A man's coming! It's all part of her crawling, fascinating . . . . Yes, that breaks my dream!

HODGE. Dream?

JULIA. Yes, one of my nightmares. Can't imagine where I get them! I must catch them from Algernon! First he howls and wakes me: then I howl and wake him: every night!

LIMP. Pleasant household!

She pays no heed. She is laboring with gruesome amnesias.

JULIA. It was just like Mary Bliss! Her eyes! . . . .

HODGE *goes over to the eastern window.*

HODGE. Let's get a bit of air. I feel that puthery. And, of course, here, they got nothing for it.

He betokens weanless yearnings.

LIMP. Wish you had my liver!

HODGE. That's friendly!

WRAGG. Feel funny, myself! Oughtn't! My people were always the pink of salubrity. Served their country gallantly till ninety. With munitions.

HODGE. What took *them?*

WRAGG. Senile decay.

JULIA. I can see it now! Her living image! Crawling! That long grey snake! . . . .

HODGE. Snakes mean something! My mother dreamed snakes, before she had me. Then I come; and she sort of—faded away.

What come after the crawl?

JULIA. After the crawl! Naturally, I fled shrieking to Algernon! Insensitive little wretch, there he lay, sucking his thumb, as though nothing whatever had happened!

HODGE. That's a sign, Julia! Last time I saw him, little beggar *had* a stomach-ache.

JULIA. He's always having them! It's his elephantine appetite! But what can I do? I must make him fat!

HODGE. Well, you been a true mother, there, Julia! Reminds me of one of them porpoise.

WRAGG. Hope you're making him a good patriot, Julia.

JULIA (*fretfully*). Oh, yes, he has a box of soldiers and a little toy sword. But he's like Alexander! He's clamoring for catapults already! And he's only five!

HODGE. Takes after his father. Lord, how that man did live! *He* died of cirrhosis, Job.

JULIA (*severely*). Pardon me, Algernon favors *my* family!

HODGE. Oh, I don't know! That mouth! . . . .

He performs an expansive flap with his hand.

Wish I could get something for this complaint of mine! I might wallow in the bottomless pit itself, and not one finger-tip . . . .

No Lazarus forthcoming, he fluctuates back to Algernon.

Does he keep good health?

JULIA. Health! Barring the nightmares and his everlasting tummy, he's vitality itself! Bursting with it! Only, that's what I say! If a mother doesn't understand the rearing of children, who does? I may be ignorant of the spinster mollycoddlings of the days of Bruce; but I *am* a mother! I can prove that!

WRAGG. Nevertheless, Algernon's gastric miseries are not quite . . . .

JULIA. They are quite as relevant as *your* contributions to the occasion! Surely the pangs of maternity have some affinity with a problem involving offspring!

HODGE (*at the window*). But you make us all so tired!

JULIA. I'm not craving an audience! If you're tired, yawn at the scenery!

LIMP (*irascibly*). Yes, but we're getting nowhere! Nothing but ailments, biblical allusions, and infantile precocities!

She squelches him with blistering politeness.

JULIA. Have a *little* patience! *Job!* We don't have to be galloping *every* moment! Even if we're not jigging our legs, our souls are moving—somewhere! . . . .

She flares suddenly to her fiercest hate.

Can't you understand, that we are simply dangling on *her* convenience? Wearing our hearts out, whilst that vampire bedizzens herself for *him!* Oh, we'll get there, quickly enough! Watch that stairway! Do you know what I'll do? Laugh! Take it for a joke! Watch! As soon as ever that palsied old mannequin comes crawling . . . .

HODGE (*thoughtfully*). 'Tain't a crawl. Not really. Dodder's the word.

Wragg. More likely to be a cropper, this time. I see, she's forgotten her cane.

Hodge. And Tommy's down on dress. She won't make much hit that way.

Julia. Don't you hate her eyes? So sly! So—snaky! And the way she coils those withered white locks of hers . . . . Ha! I suppose she thinks *that's* fascinating!

Hodge. There's one thing sure. Face shows it! She's not long for this world.

Julia. Oh, we mustn't let her do that yet! Pomeroy, pick up the cane.

He does so, and remains standing.

Hodge (*sepulchrally*). That female might pass any moment! If she don't, it'll be lunacies and peculiar dreams!

Julia (*inwardly*). Yes, I wonder what *she* dreams!

Hodge. Humph, pleasant weather we're having, ain't it? Sort of—cloudy!

He trumpets this in the manner of the angel Gabriel.

For Miss Bliss *with stately gait descends the stairs. Her hair has changed from white to silvery gray. It flows softly from a middle parting, over the ears to a coil at the neck. She is dressed in a delicate lavender crêpe de chine, daintily frilled, with a fichu of white.*

Julia *essays her laugh; but the joke chokes in her throat. Only the sickliest little gurgle escapes.*

Wragg, *with an air of gallantry, hastens forward with the cane.*

WRAGG. Here you are, Miss Bliss: *here* you are!

BLISS. No, thank you, Pomeroy. I can do very nicely.

And she sails majestically to the middle of the Hall. She speaks with the gentle dignity and control of a woman of fifty-five.

They watch her, amazed. JULIA *is petrified.*

The children await Him in the chapel. I watched them through the window, as they passed. They showed like trooping angels. My Blessed One, my Beloved, led them, her golden pennon streaming on the wind like flame. Then, suddenly, I grew ashamed. Their glistering robes gleamed so spotless beneath the searching day. My own lay close at hand: it has been ready, fifty years . . . . Oh, what does it matter, what does old age, failure, anything matter; if those young white saints out yonder. . . . . So I put on this, instead. Their laughter sounded like the quivering of sacring-bells: their footsteps as they walked along, like the pattering of penitential tears.

There is a discomfortable silence. Then WRAGG *coughs, and offers her the chair.*

WRAGG. Take a chair, Miss Bliss.

BLISS (*sitting*). Thank you, Pomeroy.

HODGE (*soothingly*). There, you'll soon be all right!

Across her, he warns the others with equinoctial privacy.

Humor her!

BLISS. Thank you, Timothy, you do: remarkably. Mayhap, I shall become less querulous, as I grow younger.

JULIA. *Art* won't bring that about, Mary Bliss!

BLISS. Oh, but it can help! Beauty is half the victory! You watch, when He comes . . . .

JULIA. Ah! As I thought!

She settles herself stiffly in the high-backed bench. WRAGG *and* HODGE *are on the other side of* MISS BLISS. LIMP *comforts his liver in the fireplace.*

BLISS. And now at last, it is all coming true! The flowers will blossom as before, the trees will wave their high branches, the little brother birds will sing; but with a new meaning. It is coming so quietly, we scarce recognize it. As a thief in the night! The trumpets of it seem far off, like mustering thunders. But it is nigh the gates. Presently, we shall awake, and find the old things done away. And to think that it is a fairy-tale after all! All magic wishing! All wrought and fashioned out of dreams!

JULIA (*jumping*). Out of what?

BLISS. Dreams, Julia. The very stuff God is made of! Even this other world—the world that is vanishing—it was a dream, too. One that had lost its channels, become clogged up, and turned to self-destroying nightmares. Now it is passing away. We are recovering our lost infancy. When He comes, He will have a deal to say about that. It will make us understand sin a little better. It will make us more charitable, more pitiful.

HODGE. You know, Miss Bliss, you hadn't ought to talk of God, that way. How would you like to be called stuff? What do *you* say, Julia?

JULIA. Presumptuous, to say the least!

BLISS (*humbly*). Well, I know I am only a little foolish old woman. But I have seen the light.

Hodge. I certainly agree with one thing you said. There's great changes going on. The world will never be the same again. I said that, you know, after the very first year of the war.

He bites his nail, pleased with his perspicacity.

Wragg. Yes, once we have accomplished our peculiar cultural aims, and called a Conference representing . . . .

Limp. Constitutionalism for one thing, I hope; and no sops to radicalism!

Hodge. War Investments for another; and none to pacifists!

Limp. Property, and no socialism!

Hodge. Home Enterprise, and no blooming foreigners! Nor trades-unions!

Wragg. Why then, divinely guided and adequately armed, we shall make the world safe for democracy forever!

Bliss. Yes, He will make all things new.

Hodge. Who? Wragg? . . . .

Bliss. Timothy! Whom are we expecting?

Hodge. Oh! . . . . Well, I don't know about *new*. He's a bit old-fashioned. Though he generally makes things hum, when he comes.

Bliss. There's the point. We must make ready for Him. Remember, there were five foolish ones, whose oil . . . .

Julia. No need to fuss! I've made all preparations! I suppose the guest room's all right?

Bliss. Oh, that is always swept and garnished. But I meant, ready in ourselves. In our hearts. Ought we not to begin, by confessing to one another, our manifold sins and wickedness?

Limp. You don't find *me* confessing!

Julia. *I'm* not a Catholic!

Wragg. I don't mind confessing one. I play poker.

Hodge. I haven't none. They're washed away.

Bliss. Oh, but I have. I committed two, only this very morning.

They strain forward eagerly to hear them.

One was vanity. Whilst I arrayed me, just now, I caught myself wondering whether He would like my hair attired this way.

Julia. Well, I won't say anything! But I happen to know his opinion on *that* subject! Go on.

Bliss. I hardly like to confess the other. It was one of the deadly ones.

She fumbles with her handkerschief.

Julia. Indeed! We'd like to hear it!

Bliss. Oh, yes, I will: I must! . . . . It came to me whilst you read my diary. Suddenly, wickedly, I—I didn't want you to do it!

Julia. Oh! . . . .

Her interest in the confession evaporates.

Bliss. It was evil pride! My penmanship was once as beautiful as yours, Julia. I imagined, if you saw it now, when my poor palsied hand . . . .

She breaks off abruptly. She is gazing at her outstretched hand with growing wonder. JULIA *glances at her sharply.*

JULIA. Well? . . . .

BLISS. Julia! This is the Lord's doing! It is made whole!

They all crane forward, curious.

WRAGG. 'Pon my word!

BLISS. And then, just now, my cane! Wonderful! I feel it subtly stealing over me! A marvellous transformation!

JULIA. Yes, I noticed that! Especially about the hair!

BLISS. *Te Deum, laudo!*

LIMP. Auto-hypnotism!

JULIA. Looks queer to me!

And she sniffs the air suspiciously.

HODGE. Wish I could get a drop for my heart!

BLISS. Hark! Do you not hear a sound? One note! And the whirring of chariot wheels! Come, let us go forth to welcome Him!

She rises in an ecstasy. HODGE *presses her back again, with the tact of a rhinoceros.*

HODGE. Come now, be calm, be calm! He'll be here. When do you expect him, Julia?

JULIA. He's due now. And not a moment too soon!

BLISS. Listen! . . . .

They do so, straining their ears. MISS BLISS *murmurs as in a trance.*

Ineffable!

JULIA (*impatiently*). It's nothing! I can't think what's hindering him!

BLISS. Hindering! . . . .

She slightly materializes, turning toward her.

WRAGG. Perhaps he's being held up by the policemen.

She entirely materializes, turning toward him.

BLISS. Policemen! . . . .

WRAGG. Well, he's a pretty high speeder; and with all these crowds in the streets . . . .

BLISS. What! Have they begun to rise already?

And she is back in the heavens once more.

WRAGG. Well, at this hour, yes! I'd have spoken myself; only . . . . I organized the recruiting, you see. But it'll be a grand spectacle! Flags and drums! Three great funeral marches by the band! A captured dirigible! Cannon! And afterwards, full-dress military thanksgivings in the cathedral.

MISS BLISS *looks about her bewilderedly.*

BLISS. What are you talking about, Pomeroy?

WRAGG. The Memorial Service, of course! For the dead that have fallen in the war.

BLISS. Dead! Do we talk of death today? . . . .

WRAGG. Well, it's not altogether inappropriate, is it? If this isn't the day of death, what is?

Hodge. I agree with you, Pom.

Julia. Everybody does, who isn't impervious!

Bliss. Oh, how blind I have been! Of course, I see! You, who dwell in the counsels of the Most High, you have made ready, you are prepared! Only I, in my darkness, have dwelt aloof! Of course, of course! I should have remembered Lazarus! And that young man, the only son of his mother—the widow . . . . I see! . . . . He will appear then, in the midst of all that stricken multitude yonder; and calmly, majestically, with one awful word of power . . . .

Hodge. Come, he's not a megaphone! He's voice enough! But not to grapple with a crowd like that!

Bliss. Not Voice enough! The Word Eternal going out from the Father!

Hodge. Can't you believe? After all, he's only human!

Bliss. No, no, that's heresy! There is that Other Side! And you know what the Creed says about that.

Hodge (*disgusted*). Well, you expect miracles!

Bliss. Undoubtedly! The greatest miracle of all! Don't you?

Julia *rises, utterly exasperated.*

Julia. Mary Bliss, have you no mortal notion in your transfigured head of ordinary earthly limitations? Do come out of the clouds! This isn't a mahatma, we're expecting! It's a plain two-legged man of God, running a revival.

Bliss. Exactly what I say! Revival: a making alive again. From the Latin, you know.

HODGE. You get such rum ideas about people. Have you ever seen him?

BLISS (*wistfully*). Not face to face! But, of course, the pictures . . . .

JULIA. They're totally misleading! Either comic travesties by the cartoonists; or touched-up horrors of himself and family by the photographers.

BLISS. I think that large one of Himself and Family by Raphael in the Louvre . . . .

HODGE. If you mean the one with little Johnny doing the pious at the back of him, it ain't a bit like him. That was only for sale.

BLISS. I know He will be different from anything I ever dreamed! I am anticipating that.

HODGE. You bet! He surprises everybody.

BLISS. Yes, He always did.

LIMP. Hadn't you better tell her precisely what's your game?

JULIA. Perfectly useless! You see her mental condition! That stuff she has been taking, I suppose!

BLISS. I know my mind is very dark. What stuff? I have taken nothing but the Blessed Sacrament, all morning.

JULIA. You know what stuff! That stuff for palsied hands!

BLISS. How thankless of me! That heavenly draught! . . . . I perceive I am still unready. Instruct me, Julia. See, I will obey you like a simple child.

JULIA *regards her with a quick searching look.*

JULIA. Obey! Me? . . . .

BLISS. As His chosen one. The revelation came to you. You were the first of all the elect. Tell me, how did His Messenger appear? Like a dream, softly? Or in shining light?

JULIA. Messenger! What messenger?

BLISS. The Messenger that brought unto you His word last night.

JULIA. Don't play the hypocritical innocent! All the world knows the appearance of a messenger!

BLISS. All the world! They are everyone of them awake but me! Had he—from his shoulders—you know? . . . .

JULIA. I don't know what uniform he wore! I was busy picking the lobster for Algernon. The maid answered the door, and brought me the message. Just nine words.

BLISS. As simply as that! And His Messenger! That is how He Himself will come! And in unexpected guise! . . . . Nine! . . . .

The mystic number thrills her with remembrances of Dante.

What were they?

JULIA. "Pump up the pigskin. Kick off at ten prompt."

BLISS. Yes, most unexpected. I must school myself for that.

HODGE. You'll never manage. He springs a new one on you every time.

BLISS (*nodding her head*). Yes, I'm learning. I must not be presumptuous and make remarks. He is not a little schoolboy.

WRAGG. And another thing! Keep silent about those flags. He's patriotic.

BLISS. Is He? Why?

WRAGG. He's one of us.

BLISS. I thought we were one of Him. Five, I mean, of course.

JULIA. Don't split hairs!—Whatever else you choose to do with them! He'll have something to say to you about that! And about your educational ideas!

HODGE. And about dancing!

JULIA. And about Dafty!

HODGE. And play-acting! He'll have a lot to say about play-acting!

MISS BLISS *glances pathetically from one to the other, as they stab her right and left.*

BLISS. I know I have been very remiss. Of course, I have tried to do my duty. But one's best is only filthy rags.

HODGE. There's just one thing about him. You'd better be on. If he gets nosing into your money affairs . . . . How much of old Nick's fortune have you left, by the bye?

BLISS (*guilelessly*). I don't know. I have never counted.

HODGE. Well, don't. I'll watch that for you.

BLISS. Thank you, Timothy! . . . . Of course, I don't know. I have always held by the Larger Hope, myself; and still do, for all living souls. Even Satan, poor thing. But I have an awful fear for myself that, after all, I shall be damned.

She contemplates this doom with deep solemnity. Then her face lightens with sudden joy.

Ah, but He will love my babies!

JULIA (*ominously*). Time will show!

BLISS (*radiantly*). Nay, eternity! And when He finds them waiting yonder in the chapel, a little flower-garden all in white; and amidmost of them that precious Heart of Gold . . . .

She is interrupted by the raucous toot of an automobile, followed by the grinding whir of wheels upon the gravel outside.

Oh! . . . .

They all rise hurriedly to their feet.

I never dreamed that it would sound like that!

She remains standing in the middle of the hall, her hands uplifted like the Blessed Virgin's at the moment of Annunciation.

HODGE, WRAGG, *and* JULIA *rush jubilantly to the window, and look out.* LIMP *still hugs his gangrene in the fireplace.*

HODGE. Do you see? That's him in the togs!

BLISS. My soul doth magnify the Lord!

JULIA. Look at his car! Red as blood! But how appropriate!

BLISS. My spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour!

WRAGG. And the flags! Simply smothered in them! What a patriot!

BLISS. For He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden!

And for one moment, she beholds the Beatific Vision.

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Second Act.

THE THIRD ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. JULIA, WRAGG, *and* HODGE *are still at the window;* LIMP, *in the fireplace.* MISS BLISS, *with hands uplifted, abides in ecstasy. After a moment she sinks back into her seat. Her hair has turned distinctly darker. She has now the poise and manner of a woman of forty-five.*

JULIA. They've taken him to the Guest Room: so that's all right! Now, Job, Timothy, Pomeroy, let's get busy. I have full instructions. He's dressed. Already got his what-d'you-call-it on. By the time he has combed and brushed his . . . .

Bustling down, she halts abruptly, glaring at MISS BLISS. *She tours around her; afterward glancing suspiciously about the hall.*

Come, Mary Bliss, we can't have you posing there, looking like Madame Somebody's Hair Restorer! He'll want the center of the . . . .

BLISS. Naturally! How thoughtless!

She walks meditatively toward the window. There she picks a pink rose from the bowl on the table, and fixes it in her corsage. JULIA *watches her every moment.*

JULIA. Ah!

Meanwhile, WRAGG *and* HODGE *range helplessly at the back of the hall.*

Pomeroy, move that chair.

He does so, listlessly, a little to the left.

Now, Timothy! Wind the talking machine.

HODGE. And what about my heart? Job, you!

LIMP. Haven't I a liver?

WRAGG. It's in my spine, I . . . .

LIMP. Oh, shut up! . . . . Isn't it enough, having to endure *his* coming, without listening to the last rattlings of senility?

He stirs the fire. WRAGG *watches him woebegonely.* HODGE, *with a bad grace and many grimaces, sees to the machine.*

WRAGG. But it has been coming on steadily all morning!

LIMP. Mine's never off! And it grows!

HODGE. Mine's the limit!

JULIA. Now, Job; hymnbooks! Bottom of the stairs.

He goes reluctantly, and brings them.

Timothy! Collection plate!

He goes with alacrity. And keeps it.

There's *your* place, Mary Bliss!

MISS BLISS *meekly resumes her chair.*

BLISS. Now that at last it is about to happen, it seems the most ordinary circumstance in the world. Nothing appears different! Here we all are, just the same little group of loving friends, going about our happy daily business; and presently—*He* will come! Is not life beautiful?

JULIA *distributes the hymnbooks. She then appropriates the middle of the high-backed bench, motioning* LIMP *to the faldstool,* HODGE *to her right, and* WRAGG *to her left.*

JULIA. Job, sit down. Timothy! Pomeroy! . . . . Now we can start at once.

She opens her book. Her voice assumes a certain unctuosity, as she announces:

M'yes! Hymn number one: the first hymn, please. Timothy, start the melody.

BLISS. What quaint little hymnbooks! So—red!

HODGE. That's Johnny! Since he's bagged the hymnbook privilege, he's made things boom. The paper's punk; but they sell like sin.

JULIA. Hymn number one! The first hymn, *please!*

LIMP. Yes, but look here, Julia! You can't go sticking measly books before us, demanding song, in this high-handed manner!

JULIA. He has to be worked up, hasn't he? I'm only following instructions! He'll never make his entrance, unless he's properly worked up. He never does.

LIMP. Worked up?

JULIA. Perfectly simple! It's what they do at the theaters! You tickle the audience with expectation: then, just before the hero enters, you give them a patriotic air or something. Naturally, they mistake their emotion for his magnetism, and he . . . .

She searches for a phrase. HODGE *finds it.*

HODGE. Cops the lot!

JULIA. Exactly! Entire reputations have been built that way.

LIMP. Have they? Well, there'll be no vicarious magnetism from me, that's flat!

JULIA. I'm not asking magnetism! I'm only asking you to sing!

LIMP. Then I won't!

JULIA. You're here, you're musical, it's good for the liver, and you've got to!

LIMP. If I do, may I sizzle in . . . .

JULIA (*severely*). Thank you! We will leave that word for *him!*

HODGE. Me and Wragg'll do. He's a crow's voice, anyway!

LIMP. Ha! . . . .

It is a snort of contempt. But he bethinks him.

Crow, eh? . . . .

And darting venom at HODGE, *he rips open the book, and joins the choir.*

JULIA. *Now!* We will unite in singing, if you please, hymn number . . . . Oh! Algernon! . . . .

HODGE. What about him?

JULIA. Nurse was to bring him to the chapel. Last night's lobster so depressed him I thought perhaps the revival . . . .

BLISS (*rising*). Oh, do let me fetch Dafty!

JULIA. Dafty!

BLISS. Yes, he's our spiritual adviser, you know; and so amusing! I think I'd like him to see these odd little books. He'd have something quite bright to say about them, I'm sure.

JULIA. Certainly not! We're here to educate, not amuse! Come, let us join together . . . .

DAFTY *pops in from the Scullery, a fiddle in his hand.*

DAFTY. Here I am, ma'am! Just put my ear to the door, to spy where you were! Can't stop, kids expecting me, I'll come later. Oh, we are having such fun in the chapel!

JULIA. Fun in the chapel! I never did in all my days . . . .

DAFTY. No, ma'am, you never did! Frolic! They're making the House of the Lord ring again! Quite like old times! First it was blind man's buff! Then I started them Gathering Nuts and May up in the chancel! Then honey-pots! And now, the Golden Child has got herself up in a surplice, and is taking off Parson Glibspit from the pulpit! Lordy, how she can act! And language! Real preacher's pow-wow, mind you, without the time-serving! All about miracles and the millennium!

Well, I must skedaddle! Just back for my fiddle, that's all! Promised them a jig! Hey cockalorum! Such a lark!

And with a cut and a caper, he scrapes himself out.

JULIA'S *composure is like the arctic north.*

LIMP. Well, I don't see how these interruptions are going to help his entrance!

JULIA *responds with a distant wintry smile.*

JULIA. We shall see! Timothy, may I trouble you, please?

But she cannot keep this up long. Her next remark rages forth like a sirocco.

Hymn one!

HODGE *operates, and the machine grinds out the hymn refrain in shattering rag-time blasts.*

They begin singing in unison, HODGE *and* LIMP *glowering, each intent on bellowing the other down. At the end of the first verse,* HODGE *puts in a tenor. Not to be outdone,* LIMP, *in the second, retaliates with bass. Ambitious of alto,* WRAGG *later soars to falsetto. The women contribute treble,* MISS BLISS *dropping out with a scared face, after the first few lines; and their raptures culminate in a four-part chorus of* JULIA *and the men.*

CHOIR.

Come, rouse your lungs and crack your ribs,
  Revival's hymn to swell:
We offer heaven: the guy that jibs,
  We give to burning hell.
Rejoice! Rejoice! In his sinful fat, he fries!
The savor of him smokes aloft: we smell him
    in the skies!

BLISS. Don't you think the sentiment a little . . . .

CHOIR. Ssh! . . . .

And the refrain blares onward, belching into hymn:

We've closed the gambling joints and clubs,
  We brighten where we are:

The damned blink up like weary dubs,
  And lamp us from afar.
Rejoice! Rejoice! In their sinful fat, they fry!
They frizzle and the juice spits up: we taste
    them in the sky!

BLISS. St. Gregory maintained . . . .

JULIA (*staccato*). His—own—words! Sing!

> MISS BLISS *bows humbly; but her mind will stray back to the Council of Constantinople. Meanwhile, more hymn disgorging, her fellows return to their feast.*

CHOIR.

  They hoist the booze, they dance, they swear,
  Their godless playhouse packs;
But now we've got the doughnuts where
  The chicken got the ax.
Rejoice! Rejoice! In their sinful fat, they fry!
They roast like sacrificial goats: we'll eat them
    by and bye!

> *During the last verse,* THE REVEREND TOMMY TRAIL, *clad in immaculate football costume striped, comes jaunting down the stairs. He is a red-faced man with huge clutching paws and a sardonic grin. He has mimicked Satan so long, he rather resembles him.*

> HODGE, WRAGG, *and* JULIA *settle themselves with the delighted anticipation of the already comfortably saved.* LIMP *looks on, in the manner of Missouri.* MISS BLISS *sits with eyes downcast, trembling, never once daring to look round.* TRAIL *is a voice to her, no more. As he begins to speak, she essays to rise, but her knees fail her.*

TRAIL'S *accent is less purely though more markedly American than that prevalent, say, in Boston.*

TRAIL. Warm up, warm up, you bunch of soda-fountain freezers! That's not the way to handle a hymn! Geraround it! Geraway with it! Biff! Whiz it into goal! Some of you sissified guys have no more kick in your souls than hocked fleas. Aunt Lizzie there, for example!

BLISS. Elizabeth! . . . .

And she beholds the sainted cousin of the Virgin.

TRAIL. You! You! Old Lavender Crêpe-de-Chine with the flower in your chest! It's roaring, not roses, gains the Throne of Grace! Cough up, you four-flusher!

JULIA. Such discernment! He spots her directly!

BLISS. Lord, I am but an ignorant, sinful woman, and very foolish. I—don't understand.

TRAIL (*mimicking her*). Language don't suit, eh? Too coarse and vulgah! See here! I learned my language way back in the little home town where I was raised; and my little home town is some conversationalist, berlieve muh! My language has been good enough to wake up Philadelphia: it's been good enough for Colorado-Grubb; good enough for every knock-kneed, sheep-jowled, rabbit-gutted minister in the land of the brave and the free; and I guess it'll do for you!

BLISS. I hope I may improve, Lord. I thought mayhap it was Aramaic.

TRAIL. Now, curitout! It was Number One Brand Up-to-date Revivalistic U.S.A.; and don't you forgerit! Are you saved?

BLISS. I fear not, Lord.

TRAIL. Then you're damned!

> MISS BLISS *crosses herself, closing her eyes in dumb agony. After a moment, she falters:*

BLISS. Amen, Lord. I will try to bear it. Thank you.

TRAIL. Bear it! This isn't pink teas and frizzy hair! What is it? Theaters? Cocktails? Shakespeare and the Lady of the Lake? Nit! It's hell!

JULIA. Such fire!

BLISS. Yea, Lord.

TRAIL. Lord! . . . . Say, what's the handout? Put me wise, Puddingface.

HODGE (*histrionically*). Peculiar! Top story! You know!

TRAIL. Got you, Stephano!

BLISS. Stephen! They are *all* here!

> *She gazes before her, as in vision.* TRAIL *watches her interestedly.*

TRAIL. Acts kind of bughouse, don't she? Only, see here! I didn't come to seek and to save sanatoriums. They have to be opulent high-brow stiffs with pork in their blocks, to get me.

JULIA. Oh, but you must! You were engaged to save *her!*

TRAIL (*turning*). Who's Sister Buttinsky?

JULIA. Who's who? . . . .

> *He grins at her humorless Europeanism, and motions to* WRAGG.

Trail. Wield the jawbone, Samson!

Wragg. This is Mrs. Manners.

Julia. Yes, we've corresponded, you know. Did you get my . . . .

Trail. You betcha! Say, that sum was for salvation only, *ex*clusive of expenses. Glad to meecha: take this one!

He thrusts at her his great left paw.

Those rubber-neck crape-heads in the square have fondled the other to a frazzle! Took a collection, and gave them my *Lazarus, come forth!* Ever see me do that stunt? Takes some pep, representing the stone and all!

Hodge. That the one where you tell them, Colorado-Grubb stands four-square for the New Jerusalem?

Trail. No, you got it all wrong: that was the other Lazarus! Gee, they swallowed it! Biggest hit I've made since Bethany, way back in God's Own Country! And the crape-heads weeping buckets!

He roars with the remembrance of his triumph.

I left Johnny to it. He savvied a chance of going about his father's business, and dropped off with a bundle of hymns. Say, that's some kid! He's putting it over all right, all right! He'll be here, when he's through.

Bliss (*fearfully*). Which—John?

Trail. Why, mine! My own particular! There's only one.

Bliss. The Beloved! Oh, he will speak for me! He is wise, he will understand!

Trail. Say, that's not so bughouse! Appreciating Johnny shows some bean. Maybe, I'll snatch her from the burning yet.

Bliss. Lord! . . . .

Trail. Well, what is it? Tango, cards, liquor? . . . .

Hodge. In this place!

Trail. Wash the marrer with her? Why don't she speak? Who is the mutt, anyway?

Julia. Why, she's the woman! You remember, old Nicholas Biggs . . . .

Hodge *interposes a loud cautioning cough; but too late.* Trail *is on.*

Trail. What! The millionairess! . . . .

Hodge. Humph, fine weather, we're . . . .

And Wragg *murmurs something about rain.*

Trail. Now, curout the barometer stuff! Curitout, see! This is business! Here's a poor perishing cocoa-sodden daff, hollering for bread; and you hand out hunks of cold storage about the weather! Leave this to muh! . . . .

Julia	(*together*)	That's all very well; but *you* . . . .
Wragg		Yes, but look here, I say . . . .
Hodge		'Taint good enough: *we* . . . .

Trail. Hold off, you grafters! . . . .

He executes a football maneuver with a hop, rush, and a slide, landing neatly beside Miss Bliss.

Say, Ma! Don't you listen to them! They're only a bunch of red-headed, starch-necked crooks and windjammers, anyway! Listen to muh! Only berlieve! Only berlieve! And I'll yank you into glory in half a jiff!

BLISS. Oh, but my sins! My vain pride! Betrayals!

TRAIL. That's the way! Stir 'em up, Ma!

BLISS. My life of fruitless half-intentions! Doubts! Despairs!

TRAIL. You gorit, Ma! Stick your feet in the trough! Roll yourself over in it!

BLISS. My iniquities!

TRAIL. It's berrer to have them! It's berrer! Or you don't get the berlood! Only berlieve, only berlieve, you lobster, and your sins will pass—kerplunk!—like Gadarene swine. You may look the same! You may act the same! These guys here, and your neighbors may never see the difference! But only berlieve, and you'll be whiter than snow!

BLISS. Lord, I believe! Help Thou mine unbelief!

JULIA. Mary Bliss! Do you realize what you are quoting?

TRAIL. Beat it, Sourface! I'm boss here!

HODGE. Yes, but . . . .

TRAIL. Now, Carrots! . . . .
Ataboy! Work it up, Ma! Gerabit of punch into it! Rah-rah-rah!—Tackle! Don't you see the light? Think of Home and Mothuhr! Don't you hear your Mothuhr calling to you? Think of your poor old Daddy's silvery hairs, the village homestead! Remember little Willie's dying words!

> Wragg, Hodge, *and* Julia *cannot bear up against this. They take out their handkerchiefs and mop their eyes. Meanwhile,* Trail *addresses his deity:*

Look at her, Fathuhr! Can't squeeze a tear! Dry as a Prohibition state!

> *He turns upon her savagely, dancing, gesticulating, foaming with inspiration:*

Can't you gerabit of fear inside of you? Don't you smell the pitch and brimstone? You'd berrer! You'd berrer! Or you won't be saved by me! Don't you see the licking flames, the red-hot lake, the worm undying, and old Beelzebub hopping about and watching for you? Rah-rah-rah! Tackle! Boom! Boodle! Boost! Geewhiz! Can't you *see* him?

> *She is not looking; but everybody else can.*

Bliss. I behold, at is were, three Blessed Shapes! Elizabeth, and Stephen, and that Beloved One!

Trail. Saints won't help any! There's only one way!—Mine! Wrestle, you dub! Get your heart jumping! Make it burn and bubble like a clambake!

Bliss. Yes, yes! A glow, a strange warmth! And with it, a deep unutterable peace!

Trail (*quickly*). You don't get peace yet! Not till after the . . . .

Bliss. But I do! It's the truth! I do!

Trail. Then, if you do, it's Satan, and you're damned! It's not peace: it's terruhr, you want! Terruhr! Terruhr! Can't you understand the word?—t-e-r-r-o-r, terruhr! Get it in your heart! Get it in your livuhr! Get it in your nuhrves, your spine, you dough-nut! . . . .

LIMP *and the saved show signs of understanding.*

BLISS. But I don't! I cannot lie! I don't!

TRAIL. Then I give you up! You're a goner! You, your ox, your ass, your man-servant and your maid-servant, your autos and your grand pianos —yes, and all your pap-soused infidel unspanked babies, too!—shall perish in the pit of fiuhr!

BLISS. Oh! . . . .

She rises, tense with some deep thought, not yet made clear. TRAIL *mistakes the action, and pounces on her at once.*

TRAIL. Hold that! Hold it tight! Hold it with your teeth! Wow! Gorher! . . . . Now, we'll take the collection. Where's the dipper?

HODGE. That's me. I'm usher!

But TRAIL *restrains him, capturing the alms-dish.*

TRAIL. Nix!

HODGE (*reproachfully*). I'm a Baptist!

He crawls abjectly to his seat.

They all watch TRAIL *earnestly, as he approaches* MISS BLISS. *She is gazing straight before her. He gently insinuates the alms-dish into view.*

TRAIL. Now, Ma!

She answers with slow, bitter irony:

Bliss. And whence is this to me? Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory! All that I have is Thine!

This sends a shiver around the hall.

Trail. All! Will you put that down on paper?

Bliss. My handwriting is a little shaky. But I will. In letters of fire!

Trail *sends the alms-dish spinning to* Hodge.

Trail. Here, take it, Rufus! Put her thar!

He proffers the frazzled paw. But Miss Bliss *does not see it. She is looking into deep abysses. The others start up in violent expostulation;*

Wragg	(*together*)	I'm darned, if he . . . .
Julia		He—shall—not . . . .
Hodge		Of all the swindling . . . .

Trail. Hold off, you panhandlers! Heard the chink of gold, did you? See here, *I'm* come to save this soul, not you! And I'll save it, or bust! . . . . Keep to it, Ma! I'm with you! Armageddon'll have nothing on me, by the time I'm through! Say, this is to be one big bout, stakes down, between the Dragon and the Lamb! Get her going, do you hear? Rah-rah-rah! Biff! Whiz! *Goal!* . . . . It's yours! Take it! Salvation, full and free!

He commences to wipe the sweat from his brow.

Bliss (*quietly*). I refuse it.

He leaves the sweat to freeze as it may.

Trail. You—what?

Bliss. I do not desire salvation, thank you very much.

TRAIL. But you've gotta! You've gotta! You can't give all that money, without being saved!

BLISS. Then I will find some other way of serving my beloved little damned.

And she sits down calmly, awaiting the brimstone.

TRAIL. Well, I'll be . . . .

DAFTY *skips in, and catches him up.*

DAFTY. Yes, but before you are, I'd like you to carry away the remembrance of a few trifling wheezes by myself. You, sir, I take it, are a funny man. They may amuse you. They may amuse also my good friends in the Other World.

TRAIL. Other world! What other world?

DAFTY (*airily*). Oh, both, both! The infinitude of them, in fact! It's all One to me!

TRAIL. Who is the lynx-eyed prowler, anyway?

HODGE (*histrionically*). He's only a poor old . . . .

DAFTY. Not so softly, Mr. Timothy, not so softly: he mightn't hear! . . . . Mr. Timothy was about to inform you in his delicate way that I am a fool. Well, sir, I am. A sort of professional one, like yourself. I don't know whether you happen to belong to our High and Ancient Secret Order; but I imagine not. There are curious initiations, rather dangerous—fiery ordeals, sacrificial burnings! We are divided into two lodges—my own affiliations, I leave you to infer. The one suckles its folly from the wisdom of the serpent: the other . . . .

His eyes rest for a moment on MISS BLISS.

from the innocence of the dove. The Illustrious and Sublime Grand Master combines both.

TRAIL. See here! You can't put one over me, by that line of goods!

DAFTY. Ah, that's precisely what the acquisitive little youth in the chapel said. But they made him eat it, all the same.

TRAIL. Say, wash the marrer with you? Eat what?

DAFTY. A confection, sir. My own making! In appearance, a fine, sweet, tasty piece of huckleberry pie; in reality, a dose of calomel. One of my little jokes! The last time I saw him, they were stuffing his pennies into the poor-box; and heaving him heavenwards with one of the flags. *Tossing the blanket*, you know!

WRAGG. That's how you let them treat flags, is it?

DAFTY. Not our own, sir! Only the enemy's!

HODGE. Which poor-box was that?

DAFTY. The one with the double-padlock, Mr. Timothy.

LIMP. And that's what you call pies! Calomel!

DAFTY. Only for bad livers, sir. Anachronistic misanthropists with cantankerous ones; and converted little youths of trading proclivities, with white ones.

JULIA. What makes you so fiendish? You seem obsessed by some foul spirit of perversity. You're a kind of nightmare!

DAFTY. Just a joke, ma'am! It's the Secret of our Order. I can feel one coming on me, now! Lordy, lordy, He can't leave me alone! He's a rare one for His bit of fun, our Illustrious and Sublime Grand Master!

TRAIL. And who is your Illustrious and Sublime Grand Master, anyway?

DAFTY (*chuckling*). The Holy Ghost. Every way.

JULIA. Stoker, how dare you!

DAFTY. Oh, I dare, all right! That's one of our initiations. Daren't you?

JULIA. This is infamous!

DAFTY. Is it? I thought it was part of our religion.

JULIA. Religion doesn't teach people to make comedy out of sacred things!

DAFTY. Yours mightn't! It taught Saint Francis! It taught the thirteenth century! It taught the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, when He made that little joke about Dives, and the "great gulf fixed." And when He put that pun upon Peter! And that good one He palmed off on the teetotallers, down in Cana of Galilee.

TRAIL. How do you know, your interpretation . . . .

DAFTY. Ah, you see, I'm initiated! I found out a lot of things like that, when they cracked the third chestnut, down in the Seventh Circle!

HODGE. Look here! *I* belong to a Secret Society. I'm treasurer. How did a fellow like you come to be initiated?

DAFTY. A little accident, Mr. Timothy, a few short years ago. When I was in the world, taking care of other people's money, like you.

HODGE. What was it?

DAFTY. I died.

They look at him with amazement.

TRAIL. Say that again.

DAFTY. I died.

TRAIL (*ironically*). Anything else?

DAFTY. Yes, I was buried. There were grand obsequies. And I went to my own place. Then, like Lazarus, I came forth.

TRAIL. Say, have you the nuhrve to stand there, and tell me flatly you were dead?

DAFTY. I'll tell you something to scare you worse than that! I'm alive.

TRAIL. See here! You talk about coming back from the grave. Are you saved or damned?

DAFTY. Both! Saved, when I forget myself, and make a joke. Damned, every time I begin thinking about my soul.

TRAIL. You can't geraway with it, that way. Have you been in hell?

DAFTY. Frequently! Lot of good people down there.

TRAIL. Well, haven't I named them?

DAFTY. Yes, but you don't properly know hell. Not yet. I regret to disillusionize you, my lurid sir, but you really paint that place abominably.

TRAIL. I mean to. I guess, your hell is one of these highbrow Fifth Avenoo gin-palaces, with feather-beds and *Selections by Paderewski* in the parlor! My hell's something fierce! It's smoke, and sulphur, and bubbling gulfs of fiuhr! Don't that paint hell properly?

DAFTY. No. It's worse! And absolutely real!

TRAIL. Say, here's a knock-out! What brought *you* down there?

DAFTY. My sins, mostly. Sometimes—other people's.

TRAIL. If you call that theology, I don't!

DAFTY. Oh! What brought Christ there?

HODGE. Well, I ain't orthodox, I ain't dogmatic: I'm just plain Baptist! And if it's your outworn Catholic Creed you're trying to ram down my throat . . . .

DAFTY. I'm not! It's your brand-new Baptist Bible. That bit of Peter's about "the spirits in prison."

BLISS. What sins brought you there, Dafty?

DAFTY. Do you mean my own? . . . .

BLISS. Yes—your own.

DAFTY. Humph! I don't know whether they will all be quite respectable to confess, in the presence of so many of the saved. You see, when I was on earth, I wasn't exactly an anybody. I was a successful man.

HODGE. Do you mean, rich?

DAFTY. Stank with it!—Millions! That was my first big sin—Theft! Next, I built great palaces, and squandered myself like a hog!—Luxury! I ground the faces of the poor, I fattened upon the harlotries, took usury, interest, tenement rents, grew ruthless. Then came pride and vainglory, and all the swollen pomps that follow in the path of pitiless ambition. And with them, uncharity of heart, vile rancour, resentments, bitter hate. Well, God had His little joke on me for that. He brought me low.

TRAIL. Didn't I say? That comes of dying without a religion.

Dafty. Oh, but I didn't! You don't remember, but you saved me yourself. There is a specially deep hell for that. Down among the liars, the abominations, the blasphemers! After my conversion, my other sins seemed light. But they weren't! Nor their punishment! I coveted my neighbor's goods, his powers, even his virtues! I grew envious, and belittled him! I tried to desecrate his highest gifts! I was present at the surpliced blessing of the workers of iniquity, and took God's Name in vain. I have cherished the dishonorable deeds of my fathers, and made their honor to perish from the earth! I have beclouded my nation's glory in a glamor of empire-building. I have besmirched my flag! Last of all, I committed murder. I began mildly, in my own factories and slums. Then I fostered pacific occupation in foreign countries. Then I went in wholesale!—I poured my billions into it! Then—I died.

Trail. And then?

Dafty. Hell.

Trail. Didn't that make you berlieve and tremble?

Dafty. I trembled. You don't believe at first. You don't know you are there. You tremble first, and believe afterwards.

Bliss. And your—resurrection?

Dafty. It took innumerable ages. You don't reckon ages there, as you do here. You get them—wrong end of the telescope, so to speak. There I lay, outside time, beyond space, in the very bottom of the pit, pondering my sins. They came one by one, each with its own pang, until I saw them—real! Then I had to name them aright. Did you ever try naming your sins aright? I did. And then there appeared—the Optical Illusion! . . . .

He sees it again in his imagination;

It was an enormous Eye!

JULIA. An Eye? . . . .

He fixes her like a basilisk, and then nods his head once, solemnly.

DAFTY. I had been gazing at it all those aeons, and had never known it. I mistook it for the sky. And it was that Watching Dread. And at last—it winked at me.

JULIA. Winked! . . . .

DAFTY. Yes! Not one of your impudent winks, you understand; but a real friendly "Come-along-home" of a wink, such as you might give yourself. It was the very first joke I ever saw. So I began climbing. And was initiated from that moment.

There flames from him a sudden ecstasy of white fire;

Ah, that Golden One! She shall never know those dark abysses! For her, the gladness and the rapture only! The unending fun among the dancing stars!

WRAGG. Well, I wish you joy of her!

DAFTY. It's mine, eternally! Why, her wings are sprouting forth already. Her eyes are dazzling with the daylight of new heavens! She, out of all the young awakening world can see! Lordy, I never met such vision, since first I started making spectacles!

OMNES. Spectacles! Did you make spectacles?

DAFTY. Telescopes, too! And microscopes! Microscopes so powerful, they can peep into the minutest heartbeat of a man! And telescopes to search the farthest heavens! This is vainglory! I shall be damned for this. So long!

He moves to the Scullery door. There he turns.

(*Chuckling.*) Oh, I forgot! That little youth, they're entertaining in the chapel! Such a lark!

TRAIL. Wharabout him? Cough up your last joke and go!

DAFTY. He tried selling hymnbooks to them! It's your Johnny!

And he vanishes rapidly.

TRAIL. My Johnny, tossed to heaven! Here! I'll revive the little skunks for this!

He bolts through the Refectory door.

HODGE. The poor-box! Chock full! And *him* about!

WRAGG. That infamy by the altar!

JULIA. My Algernon! Among those ragamuffins!

They bolt also. LIMP *is left sitting in the fireplace, silent, brooding.*

After awhile MISS BLISS *arises as from a dream, and moves slowly, feebly, up the right.*

BLISS. How cold it is!

She picks up her shawl and puts it on, as when she first appeared. She goes to the lectern, turns over the leaves of the Bible, and tries to read.

I cannot see. My eyes are dim with tears!

She finds and fixes her spectacles. Then she reads:

"I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

She gropes blindly for her cane; and then totters weakly to the high-backed bench. There she crumples up, a little bent thing, her hand trembling. She continues so for a moment. Then glancing across the fireplace, she becomes aware, in a dazed kind of way, that LIMP *is there.*

Why, Job Limp, are you still here?

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Third Act.

THE FOURTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. LIMP *still occupies the faldstool;* MISS BLISS, *the high-backed bench. Her hair is brown; in her eyes there is a growing alertness. At present, however, she still sits crumpled, shawled, and spectacled, fumbling at her cane.*

LIMP. Yes, I'm here. Romping with ritualistic infants offers no allurement to a hobnailed liver. There's nothing for it but endurance and damnation.

BLISS (*thoughtfully*). Yes, we must abandon all hope. Even Dante said that.

LIMP. It's not as if there's anything one can do!

BLISS. I wonder! Of course, if what Dafty said . . . .

LIMP (*disgustedly*). Dafty!

> *And* MISS BLISS *sinks deeper into her own meditations.*

BLISS. I suppose, I shall occupy eternity, seeking out all the little damned babies, and trying to cool the tips of their darling tongues. They will be doubly orphaned now! . . . . Anyhow, He can't stop me loving them!

> *She considers this, steadily. Then a new thought dawns upon her:*

Job, have you ever yielded to the dreadful temptation of doubt?

LIMP. It's my entire philosophy. The moment I'm shown anything, I doubt it. That and *this* infernal torment go together.

Bliss. I have wicked promptings, too.

Limp. He talks about hell!—I'm there already! And it keeps on increasing! Everlastingly! It's for all the world like quicklime in your back!

Bliss. Yes, a searching fire! Only mine's in my heart.

Limp. Oh, Lord, another of them! I suppose *he'll* come bellowing his ailments next!

Bliss. Who?

Limp. That gospel-monger!

Bliss (*shocked*). Job! If He should hear you!

Limp. I'm not afraid of his pitch and brimstone!

Bliss (*fearfully*). Isn't doubt appalling? It puts such frightful thoughts in one's head. It almost makes one rebellious against Divinity Himself! . . . .

And she begins probing another abyss:

Job, do you think, perhaps, Satan may have been a little maligned? Poor thing, he may be kinder than we have been taught to believe. Less brutal, more—cultivated.

Limp. He'd be an improvement anyway, on this fellow's scarecrow of a god! He couldn't be worse!

Bliss. What awful things you dare to say! I was thinking that, also.

Limp. Then why on earth don't you say it?

Bliss. Oh, I couldn't! I wouldn't dare! Not yet.

Limp. Yes, it's people that daren't, people that are afraid of hell, who keep this mountebank's theology alive!

Bliss. But I wouldn't quite know how.

Limp. It's perfectly simple! You only have to open your mouth, emit a few forcible words, and send shivering to oblivion an obviously mendacious god.

Bliss. Do you mean that His God . . . .

Limp. I mean that his god is a lie! Whatever gods there may or may not be, his is an imposture.

Bliss. But God must be true! Why, I have known Him! Oh, Job! . . . .

She rises, a curious gleam awakening in her eyes.

Limp. What is it now?

Bliss. I hardly know! All sorts of queer texts! In my mind! . . . . That one about Satan coming as an angel of light! The lying spirits, sent to deceive! That fearful one, foretelling false Christs and false prophets, to seduce, if possible, even the elect!

Limp. Now, you are going beyond me.

Bliss. If only I dared to believe it! If only I dared! Oh, it makes me hot to think of it!

She removes her shawl. Limp *clutches his back in agony.*

Limp. I'm burning, too! It's fire unquenchable!

Bliss (*anxiously*). Oh! . . . .

She sinks back timidly, her resolution wavering. She then bends forward with the confidential air of a conspirator.

Didn't you think His trumpet sounded a trifle coarse?

Limp. Trumpet? . . . .

BLISS. That's what I'm saying. There is a difference. A difference of ideal. I wonder why it should be just that one.

LIMP. You think it is because they had a different gentleman?

BLISS. I think it is because they had a different God.

LIMP. Look here! What's coming over you?

BLISS. I don't know. Something curious has been happening to me ever since I began—questioning, just now. My mind seems to be awakening. It is as clear as it was when I was a woman of thirty-five. I am beginning to see again. Yes, I see quite . . . . What am I doing with these things on?

And she takes off her spectacles. She then looks at him keenly.

Why, bless me! How old are you, Job?

LIMP. Forty-five! And feel like Methuselah!

BLISS (*thoughtfully*). Yes, those extra ten years tell, don't they?

LIMP. It isn't the years! It's liver! And it grows worse, when I don't get exercise! Ugh!

He rises, pressing his back, and begins doddering away.

BLISS. Poor Job! . . . . Here, take my cane. Let me help you.

She jumps up briskly and trips toward him.

LIMP. I'm not an octogenarian! Nonsense! . . . . Well! Such . . . . Treating a man of forty-five as though he were . . . .

He takes the cane, refusing her arm, with a grunt. He then crawls painfully to the eastern window. Miss Bliss *watches him from the middle of the Hall.*

What a disgusting day! Nothing but clouds! I'd feel better if there were a speck of sky in the universe! But I doubt it!

Bliss. Try doubting the clouds, Job.

Limp. Don't try that metaphysical piffle on me. I'm too old.

Hodge *enters from the Refectory. He appears woe-begone, his face puffy and puckered; and moves with the heavy lassitude of a fat man inwardly flustered.*

Hodge. Oh, my heart! Ready to burst! I'm ageing fast!

Limp *makes a noise like a snarling dog.*

All very well, saying *Wow!* I'd swop my heart for your liver, any day! That last lap round the cloisters has added twenty years to my life. Little tripehounds!

Bliss. Why, what's the trouble, Timothy?

Hodge. Trouble! Your blighted orphans are the trouble! Especially that yellow hussy with the pink legs! Pack of unregenerate heathens, that's what they are!

Bliss. Come, Timothy, I can't have my children calumniated. They are baptized members of the Holy Catholic Church.

Hodge. Yes, that's the mischief! Baptizing babies in long clothes, before they have the sense to know their

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HODGE. Yes, that's the mischief! Baptizing babies in long clothes, before they have the sense to know their own carnal minds. Not a seven-year-old in my Sunday School don't know better than that! Lord! . . . .

He tumbles into the chair, panting.

Limp (*testily*). You've evidently something to say. Stop blowing, and say it!

Hodge. You nurse your liver! My complaint's the star turn now! You haven't a drop of anything handy, have you?

Bliss. Why, certainly.

She dances to the table. He moistens his mouth expectantly.

Hodge. If it hadn't a-been for that darned football I'd never have been caught. They was all inside the chapel, hullabalooing with Tommy. Then that old resurrected corpse must needs come jigging out for the football; and he sicked the kids on me.

Miss Bliss *has accomplished her errand of mercy. She offers him a glass.*

Bliss. There! That will refresh you!

Licking his lips, he lingers fondly before tasting.

Hodge. I wouldn't a-minded, if that yellow one—with her blamed spiky elbows . . . .
What is it?

Bliss. Water.

Hodge. One thing on top of another! Here! . . . .

He hands it back again.

Ain't you got nothing interesting in the house? Something really—wet?

BLISS. Surely! Cocoa!

Inspired by that bright idea, she begins hastening away.

HODGE. Cocoa! . . . . Stop! It's no use! I'd *rather* die. We all got to go some day.

LIMP. Ugh!

HODGE. Yes, you too! Old groggy liver!

MISS BLISS *returns the glass to the table.*

LIMP. What I'd like to know is, what were you doing in the chapel porch, alone?

HODGE. That's my business.

LIMP. Yes, I know it's your business! But how much did you make on the deal?

HODGE. If you think the price of a few hymn-books can pay me for that rat-hunt round them cloisters, you're dead off it! Lanky little line-prop!

LIMP. Cracksman! Picking padlocks!

HODGE. You didn't have to, see! The boxes in this place have mouths like . . . . It's comfort I want! Water ain't no comfort, and nothing in it.

He works his features like a desirous babe. MISS BLISS, *who has been studying him closely, now comes down to him.*

BLISS. Timothy, what have you been doing with the poor-box?

HODGE. Didn't say I'd done nothing, did I?

BLISS. Precisely! That's why I ask.

HODGE. What are you nagging me for? Don't you know I'm a dying man?

BLISS. Wouldn't you wish to make restitution before you go?

HODGE. What's wrong with you? This ain't your character. I don't kind of recognize you, when you get suspicious. What's happening to the world?

BLISS. I think perhaps I am becoming saved, Timothy. There are certain Christian graces I have neglected. The wisdom of the serpent. Doubt, enquiry, investigation. I am even hoping to see jokes shortly.
Come, Timothy, give it to me.

HODGE. You'd better ask that dancing skin and bones, you call your Golden One! What more right has she to it, than me? She got it all! Some of my own, too!

BLISS. Ah! Then it is safe, in *her* hands.

HODGE. Why more than in mine! Thievery, I call it!

BLISS. There are honest thieves and dishonest ones, Timothy.

HODGE. Never could understand what you saw in that child, anyway! One of these days you'll be finding her out, and wishing you'd picked somebody more—ordinary. Mind, I'm telling you as your friend.

BLISS. Those pennies belong to God's poor, Timothy.

HODGE. There you go again! *I* ain't got them! That little baggage stripped me of my uttermost farthing! This comes of going about half-naked, and Roman Catholic practices!

BLISS. God's poor, Timothy!

HODGE. Well, the poor don't always get what's coming to them! They can't expect it! Not in an age of enlightenment and free competition.

BLISS. Some of them are starving, Timothy.

HODGE. You don't know nothing about it. This ain't a question for school-ma'ams! It's a question for hard-headed men of business! You go back to your thirteenth century, and entertain yourself.

BLISS. Yes, we'd have to go back quite some way for entertainment.

HODGE. Ain't *we* entertaining?

BLISS. I suppose we are. In a grim kind of fashion.

HODGE. Well, if we ain't funny, we have our compensations!

BLISS. Such as . . . . ?

HODGE. Such as! What about our monster factories, our skyscrapers?

BLISS. What about the mediaeval gilds, the great cathedrals?

HODGE. Consider our educational institutions!

BLISS. Consider theirs!

HODGE. What did they produce? A pack of monks! Look at our thinkers, scientists, statesmen, captains of industry! I could holler a few names now, in this very place; and they'd jump up like Jack-in-the-boxes!

BLISS. Look at Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon, King Louis the Saint of France, the nameless masters of the Crafts!

Hodge. I don't know the parties, but they simply weren't in it with us! Look at the things we done! Locomotives, electric light, ocean liners, aeroplanes!—not to mention submarines! Do you happen to know how many bushels of wheat the United States alone export annually? How many gallons of oil? Tons of silver, pig-iron? I don't myself; but it's something cruel! Don't that indicate efficiency? Ain't we the right to call ourselves the most astounding century in all history? I tell you now, as I told my young Baptists many a time: we're the human limit! And we deserve every penny!

Bliss. Not at the expense of God's poor, Timothy.

Hodge. I'm talking business, I tell you! The poor got nothing whatever to do with it!

Bliss. They had in the thirteenth century.

Hodge. The thirteenth century is dead.

Bliss. Then may it rise again, and scourge us for our sins!

The wild shrieking of a woman is heard outside.

Limp. What in the name of . . . . Are we suddenly going to resolve ourselves into a Greek tragedy?

Bliss. Yes, it's exactly like the prelude to a kommos.

The cries now mingle with the groaning of a man, followed by "Damn, damn, damn!"

That doesn't sound like Sophocles!

Hodge. Sounds like Pomeroy and Julia to me. She'll pass on some day, with them hysterics!

The lamentations continue, and come nearer.

LIMP. This suspense is getting on my nerves!

> WRAGG *and* JULIA *make parodos from the Refectory, wailing threnodically. They create a small orchestra out of the middle of the Hall, circling it with anguished pantomime; and then stand tragically opposite each other.* HODGE *edges away to the left:* MISS BLISS *to the right.*

JULIA. Algernon's safe: he overslept himself: he lives! But I am perishing!

WRAGG. I am but a bag of bones! One stark decrepitude!

JULIA. I have put on thirty years in thirty minutes! A year a minute!

WRAGG. I've put on fifty; Tommy, hundreds! He's an ancient monument! A cairn! A pyramid!

JULIA. The horrors I have witnessed! I have witnessed sacrilege! Hymnbooks, bibles, a man of God and footballs, all jumbled up together!

WRAGG. I have seen flags desecrated!

JULIA. I have beheld iniquity! I have looked upon dreams of the night!

WRAGG. If they had only shown discrimination; but they would not!

JULIA. We many times attempted extrication; but we could not!

WRAGG. That last race round!

JULIA. The ignominy of it!

WRAGG. The pickaback!

JULIA. The jump-frog!

WRAGG. That leaping wild-cat with the bony knees!

JULIA. My rumpled raiment! My dishevelled hair! and as for *him!* . . . .

WRAGG. Yes, as for *him!* . . . .

BLISS. Why, what's the matter with him?

They both wheel to the right, simultaneously.

BOTH. Matter! . . . .

JULIA. They're playing football with him in the chapel!

HODGE. Didn't he scatter them?

They both wheel to the left.

BOTH. Scatter! . . . .

WRAGG. You should have seen that last great scrimmage at the altar!

JULIA. They got him down! They pummeled him all over!

WRAGG. They whacked him with the ball, and made him yell!

JULIA. He threatened them with death: he mentioned hell!

WRAGG. But that's not all! They found another game!

BLISS. What did they call it?

They wheel to the right as before.

BOTH. Horse and wagon! . . . .

WRAGG. He was the horse, and they hung on behind.

JULIA. They danced, bare-legged! And then that shocking show!

HODGE. What shocking show might that be?

They wheel to the left.

BOTH. Saint and Dragon! . . . .

JULIA. That little yellow horror yoked him to her girdle, and made him tamely crawl!

BLISS. Ah! St. Margaret! St. Margaret!

JULIA. Another painted him in red and blue and gold!

BLISS. St. Gertrude!

WRAGG. He romps and roars!

JULIA. He grinds his teeth! He has torn candles from the altars, and trampled on them!

WRAGG. He foams, he wallows! He wraps himself in flags!

JULIA. And worse than that! Far worse!

BLISS (*breathlessly*). What? What? . . . .

JULIA. They've stuck a tail upon him, dipped him in the font, and named him Father Devil!

BLISS. Oh, glorious Gothic Centuries! Risen from the grave at last!

WRAGG. What! You condone it!

JULIA. You advocate profanity!

HODGE. You've done it! I knew you'd go too far! This comes of Orphanages instead of Lucifer!

JULIA. You—nun! You childless infidel! Do you dare . . . .

WRAGG. Have you the naked impudence to maintain . . . .

There are heard howls of childish derision, rapidly increasing in volume. They listen silently. Then LIMP *goes to the eastern window.*

LIMP. My God! . . . .

HODGE. What is it? Good Lord! . . . .

He has joined him at the window.

LIMP. Look! And the hailstones rattling down like ostrich eggs!

There is a rumbling of thunder and the clatter of hail, the laughter pealing through it like a clash of chimes.

BLISS. Oh, my army! My little army! The army with banners! I faltered, I fell by the wayside! But they, my babies, my beloved, they have kept the faith!

JULIA (*apprehensively*). Is he coming?

LIMP (*grimly*). Like an apocalyptic beast!

JULIA *goes completely off her head.*

JULIA. He is coming! He is coming! He will tear us all to pieces! Quick! Pomeroy! Turn on the machine! It may soothe the evil spirit in him, as Thingumabob soothed What-do-you-call-him!

WRAGG, *with what celerity he may, limps to obey.*

JULIA. Look to yourself now, Mary Bliss! This is the end of everything! He will come like a ravening dragon!

BLISS (*crossing herself calmly*). In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, I will.

And the Hymn of the Beast blares forth.

TRAIL *rages in from the Refectory. His football suit is all disordered, but the stripes show well. His face is painted red and blue and gold, faithfully portraying the devil as imagined —and buffooned—under the patronage of Mother Church in the mystery plays of the unenlightened ages. He is furnished with a tail. He has lost his voice; and can only express himself that way, in hoarse and almost inarticulate gibberings. He is not at a loss, however. His pantomime, which is plentiful and dithyrambic, reveals his meaning. And the hymn helps "some."*

They make wide room for him, as he staggers to the middle of the Hall.

TRAIL. I've lost my voice! I'm done! I'm a dead-beat! I'm a stiff! Wow! Doughnuts! . . . .

He performs a tortured cake-walk, making tracks for HODGE. *That worthy flies.*

HODGE. Don't you come near me! I'll pay up! Oh!

He gambols JULIA-*ward, grimacing horribly.*

JULIA. Oh! Save me, somebody! I'm a mother!

She scuttles, screaming, behind MISS BLISS. TRAIL *veers for* POMEROY.

WRAGG. Don't maul me! I'm Pomeroy Wragg! Oh!

TRAIL *dodges him round the chair. This shows off his tail to fine advantage. Also, the legend on his back:* MISTER TRALE HAS A TALE.

HODGE. Well, that's funny!

His laughter rouses the dragon in his wrath.

TRAIL. Funny! Here, where's my brimstone? Wow! Curitout! Laugh, you bric-a-bracs! Keep sunny, will you! Smile! Smile! Smile! The devil will get you! Hell! Hell! Hell! Mothuhr! Fathuhr! Terruhr! Wow! Stop that blasted wheezing-machine!

He has been dancing like a dervish all the while, chasing first one, then another of them around the Hall. Now, foaming and impotent, he falls to the ground, gnawing at the chair like an inspired revivalist. The talking machine ceases.

BLISS. Oh! Oh! Oh! . . . .

And she goes off into hymns of youthful laughter.

TRAIL (*grovelling*). What the earthly tabernacle are *you* sunny over?

BLISS. A Thing immortal, indestructible, eternal in the heavens! A Thing not builded by earthly hands! A Thing against which the gates of hell shall not prevail! Oh! I am becoming initiate! I see the joke!

JULIA. He will destroy us! Are you mad?

BLISS. Beyond recovery! Oh, Illustrious and Sublime Grand Master, receive me now!

TRAIL. Cackling won't get you there! Berlieve, you mutt!

BLISS. I will, unfalteringly! I will clothe myself in readiness! Worthy or unworthy now, I will apparel me, as a witness! Not in my own righteousness! His! His!

Julia. Mary Bliss! Think of the Day of Judgment.

Bliss. I do, undoubtingly! Oh, I have been faithless! I have betrayed my Master! I have hearkened to the voice of Anti-Christ, and the hosts of hell! My Lord, I come! I come! I come! . . . .

And, like one of her own girls, she bounds up the stairway, two steps at at time, light as a feather, and vanishes.

They stand looking after her in consternation. The thunder rumbles. Trail *lies prone on the floor, blasphemous, biting the dust. He has been brought to Jesus at last. It is perhaps the beginning of his salvation. Salvation "as by fire." So be it. In the Name of Christ, Amen.*

If required, the curtain may fall at this point, which is the end of the Fourth Act.

THE FIFTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. Julia *and* Wragg *are on the right;* Limp *and* Hodge, *left.* Trail *still cherishes the floor. Stiff, motionless, they face the stairway, then all begin babbling together.*

Limp. What's the matter with the woman? Has she gone clean, stark, raving, ecstatically mad?

Julia. She's gone upstairs to do something desperate! They can't blame me! I'm absolutely innocent!

Wragg. She's an anarchist! She's capable of bombs! She's capable of burning bunting!

Hodge. She'll take a dose of strychnine! I could see it in her eye! This comes of fool investments!

Trail. Lynch the petrified Babylonian! She's the you-know-what from Revelations!

They cease suddenly. There is a pause. Then Trail *rasps hoarsely:*

Don't let her geraway with it! Rat her out!

Limp. That's right! We must stop her!

Julia. We'll put her in a padded cell!

Wragg. If it's nitro-glycerine . . . .

Hodge. She'll be rattling by the time we . . . .

Trail. Biff! Gee! Whiz! Rah-rah-rah!

And in football formation, led by TRAIL, *they rush for the stairway. They halt abruptly; for there, heralded by crackling thunder and in a glare of lightning, appears* DAFTY, *guarding the way.*

He is marvellously changed. Clad in school-made kilt and corselet, baretoed with greaves, ridge-capped and mantled; he bears a ludicrous resemblance to a Giovanni Pisano archangel. He holds himself erect, his young-old face gleaming with ironic glee. In his hand, uplifted, is a toy sword.

DAFTY. Back, back, blasphemers!

OMNES. Why! It's only Dafty!

HODGE. In them pageant togs, I told you of.

Reassured, they rally, and make another dash. There is more thunder.

DAFTY. Stand back, or else this flaming sword . . . .

They obey unconsciously. He continues, mysteriously.

It is of wood! Its name is Makebelieve! It can work miracles! I forged it for the Golden Child, last June! Her mark's upon it!

Magnetized, though they don't know why, they edge away. All but LIMP.

LIMP. This pontifical mummery may impress priest-ridden brats! I'm not one.

DAFTY. Then for you, I bear another charm!

LIMP. I doubt it!

DAFTY. It will set you smarting, when it once begins.

LIMP. Fiddlesticks! . . . .

But he hobbles to a safe distance.

What brings you back, I'd like to know? I thought you'd done!

DAFTY. I was sent!

LIMP. What muddle-headed jester wished *you* on us again?

DAFTY. One, you doubt.

JULIA. Tell us the plain, unvarnished, *utterly paltry* truth! Where did you come from?

DAFTY. The lower heavens. I've been climbing.

HODGE. Well, I think if I'd climbed that far, I'd a-gone a mile farther!

DAFTY. Even you couldn't! Something is in the way! Descending! And it's coming nearer, every moment!

HODGE. What? . . . .

LIMP. Hailstones, you ass!

DAFTY. Armageddon.

HODGE. That means the war, don't it?

DAFTY. The final one.

WRAGG. That's a dream! There'll be war as long as there's a flag left on earth.

DAFTY. That is true!

WRAGG. Very well then! Let's prepare!

DAFTY. To the uttermost farthing! Now that there's this new army entering the field.

WRAGG. Do you mean the United States?

DAFTY. I mean this new army, descending now, out of the skies.

WRAGG. Some vast aeroplane scheme, eh? What! To-day's news?

DAFTY. Yesterday's. It's so old people don't believe it.

WRAGG. What flag?

DAFTY. No flag. It is an army, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, with symbols more terrible.

WRAGG (*hotly*). What symbols?

DAFTY. Banners.

HODGE. I don't see no difference.

DAFTY. You will, when the danger's over. In the Millennium.

WRAGG (*excitedly*). Now, keep to your story! No utopian babblings!

DAFTY. Well, that's the story, if you could only grasp it. I hold a secret commission under that army. I simply have to babble. I'm a spy.

OMNES. Spy! . . . .

LIMP *has been listening intently. He now advances, and says ironically:*

LIMP. Let's get a little clear light on this, my man. Something uncompromising and in the open. This flag-less army you crack up so valiantly! *Which of the Powers does it represent?*

WRAGG. You've got him, Job! *Which of the Powers?*

DAFTY. The Powers Supernal.

HODGE. Never heard of them.

WRAGG. I have. They are on our side.

LIMP. Shut up! . . . .

He again addresses DAFTY.

I perceive you are a faithful spy—diplomat, even!—You conceal your secrets by a jest. Did you find any more little jokes up there?

DAFTY. Five little ones. One screamer.

LIMP. And—the screamer?

DAFTY (*bowing*). The obligations of my Order will not yet permit me to announce it.

LIMP (*suavely*). Might we trouble you to regale us with the five?

DAFTY (*more so*). It will afford me infinite pleasure. In those dizzy altitudes I found the evil liver discomfitted and brought to naught. The gross heart given over to its own fatness. Envy and malice turned to suicidal dreams and foul inventions. Nations weighed in the balance and found wanting. Lastly, I found Darkness professing itself the Light; and the Light suffering it to be so for a season.

Do we get it over?

TRAIL *creeps to the fireplace on all fours, and crouches there, chewing his tail, contemplatively.*

Ah! . . . .

TRAIL (*under his breath*). Weasel-eye!

HODGE. Here, let me come! Wait a moment! . . . .

He winks violently at everybody, implying that he has a poser.

How did you manage that climb?

DAFTY. Don't wink so clamorously, Mr. Timothy. You've scared away the thunder.

HODGE. Eh? . . . .

He gapes about him in meteorological amaze.

TRAIL (*as before*). That isn't funny!

DAFTY. As for that story you desire so eagerly, it has a double meaning. I fear, as a tired business man, you . . . .

The sound of distant music arrests his attention.

Ah!—The Chopin "Funeral March"! I had that played over me, you know, when *I* . . . . Pity, it's a bit too late!

WRAGG. It's eleven! That was the time. They'll be passing here in ten minutes.

DAFTY. *Ten* will do me nicely.

Something in his emphasis rivets them. The music melts away. There is heard only the far-off beating of the muffled drums.

Beautiful! . . . .

LIMP. Never mind that infernal Memorial Service! Get on with your allegory!

DAFTY (*airily*). Ah, yes, my late ascension!

HODGE. Now for a whopper!

DAFTY. Whopper's the word, Mr. Timothy! I was never so thunderstruck in my life! I don't know, lucrative sir, how far your studies may have led you into the Science of Optics. But the marvelous discovery I have just made in that realm of light up yonder . . . .

HODGE. Hold on, now! Power and Light's my business, I'd have you know. Lucifer . . . .

DAFTY. Ah, then you'll appreciate! My dear sir, you're bankrupt! Lucifer's bankrupt! That gigantic enterprise aloft there is about to revolutionize all earthly business!

HODGE. Impossible!

DAFTY. Supremely!—Simply cannot fail! I divined that, the moment I cleft the clouds.

HODGE. Yes, but how did you get there? That's what I want to know!

DAFTY. There's the point!—The Light! I connected with the very first gleam, and was transmitted in a twinkle.

HODGE. Course, I know Science can do very queer things. Why, in my own trade—you wouldn't believe! But there it is!

DAFTY (*urbanely*). The pragmatic proof, Mr. Timothy!

HODGE. Just what I always tell them! What I say is, with Science all things is possible. But some of these young fellows think they know everything! . . . . Course, if this discovery of yours has any substantial . . . .

DAFTY. My dear sir, it's Substance Itself!

HODGE (*quickly*). I'll take an option on the first . . . .

DAFTY *fixes a demonic gaze upon him.*

DAFTY. Gently, Mr. Timothy! The first shall be last, you know!

HODGE. Come now, we know all about that!—What's your game? Well? Spit it out!

DAFTY. I admit a difficulty. The necessary limitations of human spittle . . . . Then, too, the abstruse optics of it—metaphysics, even . . . . You see, it isn't, as I at first conjectured, merely that *One* Eye! There are the others! Millions, quadrillions! The universe is swarming with them!

HODGE (*bewildered*). Millions of eyes?

DAFTY.. Infinitudes! Peeping, spying, everywhere—eternally. We have dreamed ourselves unseen, hidden away, buried in the darkness of unfathomable graves! And all around us, that world of deathless light! Eyes! They are about us now! Their glances are a fusilade of gimlets!

JULIA. Eyes! You're mad! You lie!

DAFTY. Precisely my words, ma'am! "Nicholas," I said, "you're a liar, and the father of liars!" But we're wrong! Blasphemously, devilishly wrong. If there were to be any more time, I'd prove it! But there are only *seven* short minutes! . . . .

She gasps, but he continues relentlessly.

We can't escape them, those formidable eyes! They crowd, they thicken upon us! Every moment! *You* can't escape them! You particularly can't! They are probing, pricking, piercing, stabbing to your very vitals!

JULIA. Oh! Horrible!

DAFTY. Oh, I don't know! Nice little eyes! And when one's motives are so blameless! . . . .

Hodge (*dubiously*). What kind of things are they?

Dafty. Inquisitive kind, Mr. Timothy. They search the deepest part of you! They search the very pockets! You might call them petty pilferers! Or again, policemen! Or even—angels! And microscopically small.

Hodge. Well, your ideas remind me . . . .

Dafty. Exactly! Out of the garnered treasures of your Baptist learning, you would recall that ancient gibe against the sacred teachings of Aquinas! Well, they *can!* Myriads of them can perch upon the point of a very small pin!

Hodge. Angels on a pin!

Dafty. Listen! I'll demonstrate it, in precisely—*six* minutes time! Come, one last flutter before the aeons! How much will you bet?

Hodge. Bet! I'm a deacon!

Dafty. Now, Mr. Timothy, be a sport!

Hodge. No, I'll be damned first!

Dafty. That will be too late! By then . . . .

Wragg. Look here! Keep to the point! First, it's armies in the clouds: then, optics! You deliberately sweep aside . . . .

Dafty. Sweep aside! It's identically the same story!

Wragg. Same story! What in the name of logic have optics to do with . . . .

Dafty. You amazing mole! How do you imagine the hosts of darkness and damnation are being dispersed? By *your* sharpshooting? Or by Living Eyes? Eyes are part of the battle yonder! Is it possible I am obscure? . . . . Come, let me amplify a little. There are yet—*five* minutes! Those Eyes . . . .

LIMP. Oh, damn your Eyes!

DAFTY (*like a serpent*). Not mine exclusively, sir! They are at the service of the entire creation. Including if I mistake not—you! . . . .

> *For* LIMP *stands frozen, pierced as it were by instant icicles.* DAFTY *watches him a moment, and then says slowly:*

They search everybody.

> *The silence is broken only by the distant pulsing of the drums.*

Don't they, Tommy?

TRAIL. They can search me!

> *They do, like red-hot needles. He squirms.*

JULIA (*passionately*). How do I know it's true? How do I know you are not lying?

DAFTY. What! Beginning to stab you, too?

> *She writhes beneath his gleaming eye.*

HODGE. Look here! I'll take that bet!

DAFTY (*quickly*). How much can you show?

HODGE. How much do you say?

DAFTY. How much have you got?

HODGE. I . . . .

> *He claps his hands to his pocket, and pauses abruptly. The drums have never ceased.*

Name yours!

DAFTY (*slowly*). Eternity.

HODGE. What's your joke?

DAFTY. *Four* minutes!

HODGE (*fiercely*). Name your figure!

DAFTY. You're a ready reckoner, Mr. Timothy. Multiply a myriad of angels by the number of pins you have saved; and divide everything you have stolen among the poor.

HODGE. That's queer arithmetic!

He calculates it, grasping at his heart. The drums are still beating.

WRAGG (*explosively*). What's the matter with flags, I'd like to know?

DAFTY. You, mainly, Pomeroy! You and Timothy.

WRAGG. And what about you?

DAFTY. I'm guarding them, if you only knew.

WRAGG (*bitterly*). I didn't start this. What of Julia?

DAFTY. She's dying.

HODGE (*similarly*). What of Job?

DAFTY. He's dead.

LIMP. Dead, am I? I'll show you whether I . . . .

DAFTY. Don't you know it? Or do you want more slaughter, to drive the lesson home?

LIMP. I . . . .

DAFTY. *Three* minutes!

LIMP. I . . . .

DAFTY. It has been a long debate, Sir Gentleman, notably contested. If you will pardon the pun—the Eyes have it!

And like a skilled fencer, in perfect form, he pinks him neatly in the brisket.

Sleep now, little weapon. Work's over.

He returns it gravely to its scabbard.

TRAIL. Ha! *Make*believe!

DAFTY (*esoterically*). Ah, it has another name for the initiate!

TRAIL. What?

DAFTY. Make*believe.*

HODGE. Sounds the same to me.

JULIA. After all, what is it? Just the weapon of a silly little child!

DAFTY. And you, a mother! That's all it has to be! My Golden One knows that.

LIMP *susurrates a last crumbling word.*

LIMP. And Timothy! And Pomeroy! Are they dead, also?

DAFTY. We shall learn, shortly. When the Conference sits.

HODGE *and* WRAGG *both whisper together:*

BOTH. Which Conference? . . . .

DAFTY *does not answer. He is reckoning something.*

DAFTY. *Two!* . . . .

The "Funeral March" is heard again, far off. But it is approaching nearer every moment.

How are *you* getting on, Tommy?

TRAIL. Burning! . . . .

DAFTY. The torments of the saints you slandered, Tommy!

TRAIL. Thirsty! . . . .

DAFTY. The beer you libelled, Tommy! God's beautiful beer!

TRAIL. Stiff! . . . .

DAFTY. Your lecherous ideas on dancing, Tommy! Legs, you know!

TRAIL. Ugliness! . . . .

DAFTY. Your repudiation of art, theaters: your ghastly hymns!

TRAIL. Sticky! It's like molasses!

DAFTY. Home, sweet Home! Mother! Close the shutters, Willie's dead!

TRAIL. Bitterness! Black wrath curdling up out of the pit of my belly!

DAFTY. That's your god, Tommy! Vomit him, brother! And serve the Living Christ!

TRAIL (*utterly surprised*). But I do! I'm saved!

DAFTY. Not yet, Tommy. You don't know it; but you're in hell.

TRAIL (*growling*). What do you know about hell?

DAFTY. Why, Tommy, *you* savvy that! Don't I belong?

HODGE. One thing I've wanted to know for some time. Who are you?

DAFTY. An instrument. Optically speaking, the wrong end of the telescope. I'm that Other Side, you know: that Outer Darkness!—Only, of course, it's all One, really. Do I make myself—luciferous?

TRAIL. That's no answer. What's your name? Your family connections? How do you pass your time?

DAFTY. I'm the devil, Tommy. God's naughty brother. Passing from hell unto salvation.

TRAIL. Thirteenth century doctrine, I guess!

DAFTY. No, fourth, this time. And not a doctrine, Tommy! A pious opinion of the Fathers that composed the Creed. Ah! . . . .

He is reckoning again. A long pause.

One! . . . .

He stands at attention, ceremonially placing his closed fist to his brow. Then he speaks with intense solemnity.

Brethren and fellow sinners! My Illustrious and Sublime Grand Master bids me announce His last and greatest joke.

They gaze at him in deepest horror. Then they all gasp fearfully:

OMNES. What?

DAFTY. The Kingdom of Heaven.

They are all standing. The stillness of doom descends upon them. The "Funeral March" swells to a reverberant roar, as the procession passes by the Orphanage. The sound decreases.

MISS BLISS *appears below the window of the Angel of the Resurrection. She is like a girl, glorious with immortal youth. Her eyes flame miracles of radiant joy; her dark hair is streaming loosely from her, as though blown by some unearthly wind. She is clad in robes of the blessed resurrection, and bears in her hand a small lamp burning. She descends halfway down the stairway.*

BLISS. Awake! Awake! Awake, ye dreaming dead! He is come! His chariots are thundering at the gates! The long dark night is passing away! It is morning! He is making all things new! Ye dead, awake! Awake! . . . .

The music crashes into triumph, and wails away again.

The kingdoms of this world and the glories of them are no more! They are cast down, they are demolished, they are utterly overthrown! And in the place that knew them, there is risen the Empire of the Lord our God! *Gloria in excelsis!* . . . .

The mourners shall no longer weep! He shall wipe away all tears! Lo, the mighty hosts and the multitudes of them, numberless, with banners streaming! He is the resurrection and the life immortal! *Gloria! Gloria!* . . . .

The laborer shall no longer eat his bread in bitterness! He shall toil for very sweetness of man's joy therein; and he shall gather where he sowed; and none shall say him nay!

Beauty shall abound; and in the hearts of all men, deathless love! *Gloria! Gloria!* . . . .

The pomp and blasphemy of ruthless war is done away! It whirls to dust, it sobs into oblivion like a shuddering wind! The swords are broken! The plow-shares are at the beating! *Gloria in excelsis Deo!* And on earth—Peace!

The music now comes rattling through the Hall like thunder.

Crumble, ye sepulchers! Break through your prison-bars, ye living dead! Cleanse you of your sin! Put away from you the accursed thing! The Lord is at hand! Arise and meet Him! Lazarus, I say! Lazarus, come forth!

The music cracks suddenly, like a heart in mid-throbbing. From it there emerges one clear note of seraphic sweetness, long continued. It grows in volume.

A flood of sunshine pours in from the eastern window, bathing the Hall in light. Up in the Gothic arches, like winged cherubim, there are fluttering beams. The window of the Angel of the Resurrection becomes a blaze of everlasting gold.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The curtain falls. It is the end of the play.

THE FOOL FROM THE HILLS

A FANTASY OF NOWHERE SETTING FORTH IN
SIGNIFICANT FORM BY THE AID OF SEVEN
PLAYERS THE DOINGS OF A DAY THAT NEVER
WAS, FOR CHILDREN YOUNG AND OLD THAT
WISH TO BE AMUSED

The Bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life to the world.— John 6:33

The Fool from the Hills, commenced in November, 1917, and completed in September, 1919, was first produced by the author and his wife at the Little Theatre of the Bennett School of Liberal and Applied Arts, Millbrook, New York, April 10, 1920. Later they gave two benefit performances, one at Park Square Theatre, Boston, April 13, 1920, and one at Albaugh's Lyceum Theatre, Baltimore, May 1, 1920.

This is its first appearance in book form.

THE FOOL FROM THE HILLS

The Fool from the Hills is a Fantasy of Nowhere, setting forth in Significant Form, by the aid of Seven Players, the Doings of a Day that Never Was, for Children Young and Old that Wish to be Amused.

The Time is during the Famine.

The Place is the Garden of Dreams. The odd-looking building on the right is where they live; it is a bakehouse. The high yellow walls of the garden, covered with roses, are to keep out the jungle; and the slender door set in the glowing shadows of the archway at the back is the door that must not be opened. That is why it is chained and bolted. One can see the jungle peeping over the copings; and beyond it, patterned against a sapphire sky, the Hill of Light where dwells immortally the Master Baker no man ever saw. To find him, one would have to journey through the jungle. Only one would never dare. For there is a dragon in it.

The Stonework on the left, with the tree behind it, must surely be a fountain. And the bamboo things opposite, though they do look like sugar sticks, may be stools. They are stools. But the steps running down from the garden to the place where the people are need a bit of explaining; for they mean something. They mean that the people, sometimes called the Audience, are a part of the story. They are exactly one-quarter of it. It is like this. Reckoning from the top downward, first there's the Hill of Light; then the Jungle; then the Garden; and last of all, the Valley of Darkness. Just four, see? Well, the valley is where the people are.

The Persons represented are Habib, of the world; Shams, of the flesh; Amr, of the devil; Gevher, of the garden; Ferda, of the wall; Jalal, of the hills; and the Sultan, of the palace.

THE FIRST ACT

The story opens with an unusual spectacle. Three gorgeous gentlemen, all wearing high Bagdad hats, all behaving alike. They puff a lot of smoke. They say nothing. With much emphasis.

They are not really funny; they are persons of importance—a ripe age having bestowed that faculty. Habib *is the name of the flabby one;* Shams, *of the fat; and the skinny one is* Amr. *They are as old as old can be. Perhaps a thousand. Hard by them stand their wands of office; imposing staves of gold, with knobs to them.*

So there they sit dumb, smoking. After a while the skinny gentleman dislodges his pipe, eyes it sourly, and starts talking.

Amr. Opium's not what it was. I mind the day when a couple of whiffs would whisk you into dreamland.

Shams. It's that pepper they put in. I'm no fusspot; only doctored opium is so bad for the body.

Amr. It's so bad for the soul. Take away our illusions, what's left? Nothing but reality! Why spoil a good snooze by waking up?

Shams. And what's the dustman doing? Didn't we appoint a commission for the express purpose of providing dust for the eyes?

Amr. The Dust Commission's no go! What's the good of darkness everybody sees through?

Habib. It's the War!

Shams. It's the Famine!

AMR. It's the Revolution! This brand-new party of squeaking schoolboys pushing into power.

HABIB. Don't worry! There'll be opium to burn now the War's over! *And* dust!

SHAMS. If we don't all die of the Famine!

AMR. Or get scrapped in the Revolution! . . . . They're such kids! *We* never dreamed of administration until ninety. And the Crown Prince as bad as any of them! His majestic father is that vexed, he vows he'll cut him off!

HABIB. With a shekel?

SHAMS. With a sepulcher! Time too, precocious little ragamuffin!

AMR. They're making Empire ridiculous! And look what we've done for them! Didn't we give them balloons and processions? Didn't we crush the enemy? Capture his trade? Wasn't our peace palaver the very triumph of high finance?

SHAMS. And what's the result? Starvation! Not a loaf of bread in existence! And their leaders living on the fat of the land!

HABIB. If we could only get around them, gain their confidence . . . .

AMR. Fiddlesticks! "The World, the Flesh and the Devil": there's *our* nickname! That's what reality does! Strips us of our every rag of dignity, and leaves us labeled like that! And the Sultan's privy counsellors!

I don't mind the War—I planned it myself: I can survive the Famine; but I do loathe the Revolution!

SHAMS. They're such clever brats! Look at these new tortures they've invented!

AMR. There again! Under our régime, only really common people were ever tortured at all. These young ruffians torture indiscriminately, rich and poor alike. We did confine ourselves to mutilation and a massacre now and again. They get at your very money-bag. Such needless cruelty!

HABIB. They can't get at mine. I'm incorporated!

AMR. Oh, we can dodge a little. But for how long?

SHAMS. It's their gastronomical torture irks *me!* All this food tomfoolery! The worst of it is, even if we had the flour, there's no one to bake it! Everybody's dead! Of course, we pig along all right up here.

HABIB. Thanks to my careful hoarding! There's plunder enough in yon bakehouse to hang every one of us! Even sugar!

SHAMS. A man of my relish can't always be puffing up to this dreary den for a bite of grub! It's down there—there!—where they give you nothing but pap! I want bread! Imagine! Here's mankind provided with a perfectly beautiful tummy, and the law says *pap!*

HABIB. You're a thankless dog, Shams. Nothing pleases you! We've had a profitable war, a most fruitful peace, the Almighty simply smothering us with mercies; and you grumble! Do show a little decency; we have the earth!

SHAMS. What an amazing ass you are, Habib! You can't eat coupons!

AMR. What I say is: If privy counsellors, why don't we privy counsel? We have the Sultan's ear.

SHAMS. What's the good of an ear when his hands are tied?

AMR (*coldly*). I presume a trifling policy bumbled therein might not prove untimely!

HABIB. Yes, and get our heads snapped off!

AMR. He'll be getting his snapped, if he doesn't stir his royal stumps soon!

HABIB. Well, what's your policy?

AMR. I haven't one.

SHAMS. I have. Leastways, not a policy—an amorous longing. It's concerning food.

He imparts it with profound solemnity:

What's wanted in this distressing crisis of the world's history is a magician. Somebody who can work marvels with a word. Somebody who has only to dream bread, breathe the name of bread, and it wondrously appears. I am not he; I've tried. A baker's the man! A magical one! Secure the services of a real live *magical* baker, and our problems end. Of course if he's dead . . . .

AMR. Or yet unborn!—*That* might hinder!

SHAMS. My difficulty lies deeper. The Sultan may dislike it. He may even go so far as to pronounce the dreadful sovereign *No!*

AMR. We might waive that point till we secured the baker.

SHAMS. There's another difficulty! *He* most certainly would refuse to come. You really couldn't blame him, considering.

HABIB. And a magical baker! What possible consideration can be more favorable than famine?

SHAMS (*darkly*). It's not the Famine, I'm considering. It's . . . . *Well, you know what we did to him!*

AMR. O-ho! *That* baker!

And he begins thinking very hard.

HABIB. Do you mean Jalal?

AMR. Softly, you fool! *She's* in the bakehouse!

HABIB (*nastily*). Well! She's far too innocent to understand!

SHAMS. She's deeper than you think! I know girls!

HABIB. All I asked him was the simple question: Did he mean . . . .

AMR (*biting the words*). I meant the former occupant of this solitude!

HABIB. Exactly what I said: Jalal. Go on, Shams. What do you propose doing about him?

SHAMS. Doing's not my function. My function is desire. You're the devil, Amr; devise something.

And they both look at him expectantly.

AMR. There's no denying it, the fellow could bake.

SHAMS. Everybody partook! The monarch upon his throne! The peasant upon his dunghill!

HABIB (*significantly*). Yes, and what about making holy bread for common people?

SHAMS. I can taste it now!

HABIB. What about flouting the imperial dumplings?

SHAMS. They *weren't* nice!

HABIB. High-falutin did for him! Double meanings! Tagging significances to plain ordinary food.

SHAMS. But it's so long ago! Significances add a kind of flavor when it's long ago! They're mellowed enough by now to be positively tasty.

AMR. Shams, you've given me an idea! We must claim them! We must expound them, make them our very own! We must claim both them and him!

HABIB. Him and his crack-brained significances! What for?

AMR. Why, there's our policy, don't you see? It's threefold: *Restore the baker; placate the mob; oust the kids*. Our policy, gentlemen, complete! Barring details and the unforeseen.

HABIB. What if the kids claim first?

AMR. They're not awake enough for that. They're only in the blinking realistic stage. You have to be quite wide awake for him!

HABIB. That's a bit too clever for me!

AMR. I'll adapt myself to your capacity.

HABIB. I'd be obliged.

AMR. Then reconsider my three points. To oblige you, I will begin at the wrong end. Now, it must be obvious to the simplest financier that ousting the kids means first placating the mob. There I imagine we might agree.

BOTH. Agreed!

AMR. Similarly, placating the mob depends entirely upon restoring the baker. Is that so?

BOTH. So!

AMR. Now! Habib, favor me with your rapt attention. *Restore the baker:* We observe here, two distinct deeds demanded: (*a*) find him; (*b*) obtain the royal assent to his restoration. The former calls for supernal courage and endurance; the latter for a moment with His Majesty. Which shall we do first?

HABIB (*emphatically*). I say, Find him!

AMR. Then do so! That's *your* function.

And he leans back for a Sabbath rest.

HABIB. Of all the sauce! What about yours?

SHAMS. We've done ours! *You're* the world! You lost him!

HABIB. *You* desired it! *You* devised it! The whole Empire clamored for it!

BOTH. Find the baker!

HABIB. But . . . .

BOTH. Find the baker!

HABIB. You disloyal dunderheads, you know the Sultan's unbending will! He'll never, never consent! Sultans don't climb down like that!

AMR. I've known them *tumble* before today! Come! We're eager for the ousting and placating!

HABIB. Well, I won't do it! I won't, I won't! I'd rather join the Revolution!

AMR. Explain yourself, sir! In language befitting a minister of the Crown!

HABIB. Language, eh? Want something mild and diplomatic for the archives, do you? How's this, then?—I'll see you bombed first! Both of you! *And* His Nibs! If I so much as shift one gouty foot to find Jalal . . . .

AMR. Habib! You babbling . . . .

HABIB (*savagely*). You needn't keep on advertising that girl in the bakehouse! We all know she's there! We all know she's Jalal's unsuspecting daughter! We all know she's Nunky's Little Blue-Eyes, fed on lollipops and fairy tales! It makes me sick, this everlasting coddling of Gevher!

AMR. *Now* you've done it!

SHAMS. One moment! This wants subtlety!

He winks, and tiptoes to the bakehouse. There he begins cooing like an uncle.

I hope you're not listening, Gevher! Though for that matter, we're saying nothing! Absolutely nothing!

GEVHER (*cooing too*). Then it wouldn't be any use listening, would it, Uncle?

SHAMS. It's all right; she knows nothing! What are you doing around that oven?

GEVHER. Only playing.

SHAMS. Well, close your ears like a good little girl, and go on with your game.

GEVHER. I will!

SHAMS. That's the way to fathom the heart of a child!

HABIB. Is it!

They make faces at each other, and SHAMS *resumes his seat.*

AMR. And now to proceed with the affairs of Empire. I take it, Habib, that your recent treasonable outburst was a jest. Or do we report it to His Nibs?

HABIB. Oh, don't be funny!

AMR. Good! Then at the outset of your quest for—you know whom, I can imagine you sagaciously inquiring: "Where is he?"

HABIB. Exactly! I'm glad you thought of that! Where?

SHAMS. Out there in the jungle of course! Where you yourself cast him to the dragon.

HABIB. Indeed! I had forgotten the incident!

SHAMS. Forgotten the day we came in here! Forgotten the day Gevher was born!

HABIB. You don't say! And I suppose the dragon hasn't been busy all those fifteen years!

SHAMS. If he's devoured, so be it! That's one of the things you've got to find out!

AMR. Not at all. There's the joke. *I* contrived those tortures, remember.

SHAMS. I conceived them!

HABIB. I carried them out! "Scourge him, stone him, seize his goods, and cast him to the dragon!" I can show you the royal mandate. Where's the joke?

AMR. There is no dragon.

HABIB. No dragon! But you said there *was!*

Amr. I was a liar! So was he. He said there was an immortal master baker in the hills yonder. My dragon was to cheer his journey thither through the jungle.

Habib. No dragon!

Shams. No master baker! Isn't there anything?

Amr. Not a flea-bite anywhere! Not even ourselves!

Shams. Well, I never! I always thought there was!

Habib (*joyously*). Why then, I needn't do it! Don't you see, there's nothing to do! And even if there were, I'm not here to do it!

Shams. Look here, you juggler . . . .

Amr. Stop! We must not be too hasty! Let us cogitate.

They poke their temples with their forefingers and do so, knitting their brows.

Shams, he's right! This is another of our blind alleys. It's exactly like our peace bust-up! Before the War we rashly pledged ourselves to a certain public end. When the palaver came, what happened? We weren't there to do it!

Shams. Our policies do seem to fizzle, don't they?

Amr. Occasionally. At the same time, Habib needn't be pig-headed. He might at least pretend.

Habib. Pretend there's something when there's nothing?

Amr. Why not? It's done! The Dust Commission does it regularly!

Habib. What's the good of lying? Now I ask you, what the good?

AMR. To preserve the Empire of course! He hasn't a spark of public spirit!

HABIB. Do you dare to impugn my patriotism? I'll soon show you whether I'm patriotic! *Toodle-oodle-oo! Long live the Sultan!*

OMNES. *Toodle-oodle-oo!*

> *For this sacred rite they rise, removing their lofty hats. All are bald-headed.*

HABIB. Only of course there isn't a sultan!

AMR. I'm glad you think so!

> *And they all sit down again, much relieved.*

SHAMS. But there must be something somewhere, if it's only porridge. I grant you: *There is no bread.* But how about hunger? I can feel that here. Oh, my magical baker would have been so comforting!

AMR. Of course he would! Habib is so darned literal!

SHAMS. If he'd only come on his own hook, without having to be found. Or send somebody. I think he ought to send somebody, and him professing to be so holy. A magical basket of loaves would do!

HABIB. There *are* no baskets!

AMR. Don't do it! Can't you see he's pretending?

SHAMS. I'm not! I'm in dead earnest! . . . . (*Dreamily.*) And to think! One word, one tiny word would do it! I can imagine him! He'd close his eyes, so. He'd consider. Deeply! . . . . Then his lips would move. And almost before he could get the word out of his mouth . . . .

His eyes pop open very suddenly. He sniffs the air.

Bless me! Do you fellows notice anything?

HABIB. Where?

SHAMS. In the air! Everywhere! A delicate fragrance!

HABIB (*looking around him*). That's odd too!

AMR. It's like a waft of incense! Warm! Pervading! It's like a blast of summer!

SHAMS. It's like honey! Ambrosia! It's like a gardenful of flowers!

AMR. There! That touch of spice to it!

SHAMS. It's magic! And remember, I never even spoke the word! I just concentrated! Calmly, soulfully! And it came like manna from the skies!

HABIB. Haw-haw! Skies!

SHAMS. Do you gibe me, unbeliever?

AMR. Do you bite the hand that feeds you, traitor?

HABIB. I don't bite, I don't gibe; I interrogate!—*What's Gevher up to in the bakehouse?*

BOTH. Gevher!

SHAMS. You don't suppose . . . .

AMR. You surely don't pretend . . . .

HABIB. I don't suppose, I don't pretend: I deny! Here she isn't.

But she is for all that. She appears with a little basket, one slim arm encircling it lovingly. She is like a pearl.

GEVHER. I've made them! I made them myself with my own hands! I don't know what they are—the book never said; but they're here, next my heart. Little warm, brown things, smelling like myrrh!

SHAMS. Hurry up! I'll take mine now!

GEVHER. No, you have to be hungry first! The book was very particular about that.

SHAMS. Lord, I'm qualified! What book?

GEVHER. The book of magic of course! You remember! The book we dug up out of the rubbish heap behind the bakehouse.

SHAMS. That thing! *I* never found any magic in it!

GEVHER. Then you weren't properly hungry. It keeps on telling you that all through.

SHAMS. I'll guarantee the hunger! Have you got it right? Did you put in every jack thing it said?

GEVHER. Every single one of them except the innocency.

SHAMS. Innocency! What in the world's that?

GEVHER. Exactly! You see, the book said: "Mingle with innocency and stir well in." Well now, you can't mingle with something when you don't know what it is, can you? So I put in milk instead.

SHAMS. Does that convey anything to you, Habib?

HABIB. Nothing! If that!

AMR. Tell us precisely what you did.

GEVHER. Well, it was like this. First, there are the ingredients. They're easy! You only have to look about you, and there they are! Yes, but wait! That's only the beginning. The mixing and the kneading are the difficulty. You wouldn't believe! Just so much this, and just so much that; watch carefully here, and guard ever so fearfully there; and I can't tell you how many failures before you succeed. Even then there's the awful weighing and the shaping! And last of all, the glorious wonderful fire to prove it right! That's perfectly plain, isn't it?

SHAMS. Simplicity itself! And to think! That book's been kicking about the house for ages!

HABIB. I don't believe a word of it!

GEVHER. But it's true! You must believe things when they're true! Here's the proof!

HABIB. I deny the proof!

GEVHER (*chuckling*). You won't when you see them! Look! The darlings! I've made four.

She removes the napkin covering the basket.

SHAMS. Marvellous!

HABIB. Incredible!

AMR. Most opportune!

GEVHER. Now! Do you think you are properly hungry yet?

SHAMS. I'm one aching void!

GEVHER. Then there's one for you! One for you! One for you! And . . . .

SHAMS. No, no, nonsense! It's bad, very bad, for little girls! Makes their hair go bristly! Give it to me! Ah! Nasty!

GEVHER. The book didn't say so!

SHAMS. You read further on, you'll see! Oh, horrible! Burning brimstone! Besides, there's a nice bowl of pap waiting for you in there.

GEVHER. I don't want pap! I want my little warm, brown thing!

SHAMS. Wanting's very naughty! It's greedy, it's gormandizing, it's what pigs are! Come, you fellows, fall to!

And he is about to take his first bite.

AMR. Stop! I have an important communication to make. This mysterious substance is nothing more nor less than . . . .

SHAMS. We know what it is without speechifying! Now, Habib!

AMR. Stop! *Toodle-oodle-oo!* By that sacred incantation, the priceless legacy of our fathers, I charge you, stop! This shows every semblance of the genuine stuff! It is crisp, well browned; it tickles the nostril. But in this hour of universal famine, there is one small point about it to be observed. It must not be eaten.

BOTH. Who says so?

AMR. The law.

SHAMS. Go on! We're safe enough up here!

He attempts another bite. AMR *restrains him.*

AMR. Not so! A weighty matter of the state forbids. I have a policy.

SHAMS. Another of them!

AMR. The same, with a revision of clause one. Hand me that substance.

They do so, reluctantly. He restores it to the basket, covering it.

Gevher, sit. That nice comfortable place there, on the ground.

She obeys, and at once starts blowing dandelion balls.

SHAMS. This is so like Amr! Such a fusser!

AMR. Now! Remembering the proverb about little pitchers, we must adopt the language of diplomacy. We must not be intelligible.

GEVHER *is busy watching her wonders as they float away.* AMR *raps the counsellors to order with his opium pipe.*

Toodle-oodle-oo! Gentlemen of the Privy Council. Since our last session, an occult incident has occurred, rendering the restoration clause of our former policy superfluous. In other words: *Let the Dragon feast his fill: we have the scraps!* Do you tumble?

BOTH (*irritably*). We tumble!

AMR. I now propose we replace that clause by another, relative to the discovery of a certain young party of unusual powers. *The scraps will serve our purpose better than the feast!* Get that?

BOTH. We get!

AMR. Our immediate duty therefore becomes radiantly clear. It is twofold: (*a*) prepare the party; (*b*) acquaint the Sultan.

SHAMS. That's settled then! Now for the grub!

AMR. No, no! Not yet! We share that pleasure with His Majesty.

SHAMS. If you think I am going to take my valuable victuals down there among those harpies . . . .

AMR. Not so! The imperial pleasure will be consummated here.

BOTH. Here!

AMR. This very day.

They both begin dissenting violently.

The Fatherland demands this sacrifice, gentlemen! Also our own skins! *Toodle-oodle-oo!* The discussion is closed! . . . . Gevher! *Gevher!* . . . .

For by this time she is lost in the skies.

What have we been talking about?

GEVHER. Bubbles.

AMR. Bubbles!

GEVHER. Yes, you know! Big round things you blow up with your mouth, and then they fly away and burst.

AMR. Good! Our Conference is yet secret; there has been no leak. Now listen, Gevher. I have something to say to you.

You have been a moderately good girl. Perhaps a trifle disrespectful to the nice, kind uncles who have brought you up so generously; but not entirely disobedient. You don't listen, don't undo that door, never leave the garden; and now you've made these dainty—let us hope they may prove tasty—titbits. This is high praise! We are going to reward you. Now what is quite the most wonderful thing that could ever happen to you?

GEVHER (*quickly*). I want to see the Crown Prince!

AMR. Well, you just shan't! Besides, you can't; he's practically dead. But you've guessed very very near. *You shall see the Sultan!* There!

The others echo this interjection.

GEVHER. Why is he practically dead?

AMR. They're going to chop his head off!

GEVHER. Who's going to?

AMR. The Sultan! Now I want you to learn how to receive His Imperial and Most Benign Majesty in due and proper form.

GEVHER. Why are they going to chop his head off?

AMR. He's a bad boy! He peeps, he listens, he grumbles at pap! What's more, he doesn't pay attention to his elders when they're speaking to him!

GEVHER. Poor little boy! Do you think if he was to . . . .

AMR. Pay attention!

GEVHER (*subdued*). Yes, Uncle Amr!

AMR. Now, I don't wish to startle you; but . . . . You have never met the Sultan, and . . . . In short, how do you picture him in your mind?

GEVHER. Oh, sort of old and big and snorty!

SHAMS. She's right about snorty! And his language—well!

GEVHER. Does he spit fire? Has he a tail?

Amr. Neither of those accomplishments is his. But your ignorance does you great credit. It shows you have been properly brought up. I will now enlighten you. At the same time, my child, prepare for an awful shock. *The Sultan is only a man!*

Gevher. Only a man! How horrid!

Shams. A confoundedly ill-tempered man!

Amr. Your uncle means he is rather a talkative man.

Habib. I shouldn't even call him a man! He's less, far less! He's the size of a cipher!

Gevher. Oh, tiny! *That's* nice!

Amr. Your uncle means he's not as big as you'd imagine.

Habib. I mean he's not as big as *he* imagines!

Gevher. Tiny and talkative! How lovely! What does he talk about?

Amr. Himself mostly. You must be careful to humor him on that point.

Gevher. That's quite easy! Is he funny?

Amr. You tell him so; and he'll off with your head—snick!

Gevher. Can't I even laugh at his jokes?

Habib. His jokes! The Sultan's jokes! Haw-haw!

Gevher. I see, I see! Funny *that* way! When's he coming?

Amr. When you least expect him! So be prepared! And remember this: The instant he appears, down on your knees, touch his toe with your forehead, and say very respectfully, *Toodle-oodle-oo!*

GEVHER. Why must I say *Toodle-oodle-oo?*

AMR. To show your loyalty of course!

GEVHER. Oh, that's silly! I don't want to play that game!

AMR. You'll do it, and you'll do it seriously, like a good little patriot!

GEVHER. Well, I'll see; if he's nice, I may. What shall I call him? Nibs?

AMR. You'll call him nothing so outrageous! Call him "Your Majesty!" Unless it should please him to come incognito. In that case, ignore his royalty, and call him whatever name he gives you.

GEVHER. What's incognito?

AMR. In disguise.

GEVHER. Now I knew he'd come in disguise! They always do!

SHAMS. One more thing! Most important! Not a word about those barrels in the bakehouse! The very name of sugar sends him off in a second!

GEVHER. I know! The fatal word! Something dreadful will happen! He'll change back again, or turn into a monster, or fade away; and I shall lose him forever! *Sugar!* I'll remember.

HABIB. And yet one more. The most important of all. He doesn't exist.

GEVHER. A fairy! Oh! I adore him already!

AMR. Then that's all. We'll away, and prepare for his appearance. Expect him any moment! Gentlemen, the Council will dissolve. Gevher, our wands of office! . . . .

She hands them to them one by one.

Next, the symbol of our power imperial! Our high and holy hats!

She hands these also; and they perform the solemn ritual of dissolving. First, they stand in august line, bald-headed, and crow like poultry:

OMNES. *The Sultan! Toodle-oodle-oo!*

Then, purple with patriotism, they clap on their towering headgear, and strut grandly through the bakehouse door. SHAMS *has one last word before departure:*

SHAMS. And whatever you do, don't touch that! Ah, nasty! Nasty!

Left to herself, GEVHER *does a little dance round the garden. She then sinks down by the fountain and thinks aloud:*

GEVHER. He's tiny, he's funny, he talks of himself! He will come in disguise at any moment! I mustn't say *sugar!* He doesn't exist! And he's a fairy! . . . . I'm sorry it's not my poor little prince! But then if he hasn't a head . . . .

She is interrupted by someone climbing over the wall. It is a slender youth. He slips down a peach-tree, looks around guardedly, sees nobody, and straightens himself up. It is the CROWN PRINCE *incognito. He is calling himself* FERDA. *He is like an opal dawn. He also begins thinking aloud:*

FERDA. Safe from those sleuth-hounds at last! My disguise, this little cloak, has served me well! Pest on the imperial brood! And now to explore this desolate place! . . . .

He wraps his disguise around him, and creeps stealthily toward the bakehouse. GEVHER *gives a little cooee. He turns.*

Ha! An ambush!

GEVHER *skips toward him, plumps down her head on his toe, and cries gaily:*

GEVHER. *Toodle-oodle-oo!*

FERDA *is bewildered for a moment. Then he gasps:*

FERDA. Get up! Don't be a silly!

GEVHER (*rising*). There! I said it was silly!

FERDA. Then why do it? That kind of kid's play may amuse sultans! It only makes me mad!

GEVHER (*slyly*). So then—you're not a sultan?

FERDA (*emphatically*). No, I'm jolly well not!

GEVHER. Go on! You are!

FERDA. If you call me sultan again, I'll go right away! I'm not going to be insulted by girls! I—I'll do something frightful; you see if I don't!

GEVHER (*calmly*). You can't till I say the word.

FERDA. Oh, can't I? You don't know what I can do! Yours isn't the only word there is!

GEVHER (*uneasily*). Oh, I didn't know that; I beg your pardon. All the same, you have to be somebody! What name are you going to give me?

FERDA. I'm not going to give you any name! What's the use of running away, if you tell everybody your name?

GEVHER. Oh, you fib! You're not running away! You've come because of me.

FERDA. I never came because of you! I wouldn't come because of you, even if . . . .

And he finds himself taking a long look at her.

GEVHER. My name's Gevher. That means "pearl!"

FERDA. Well, you may call me Ferda. It isn't my real name; it's a pretend one! I'm somebody important! Ferda means something important too! It means "tomorrow"!

GEVHER (*mocking*). "Tomorrow!"

FERDA (*angry*). "Pearl!"

Then they look at each other shyly and burst out laughing. If required, the curtain may descend at this point, which is the end of the First Act.

THE SECOND ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. That means the garden is still there; and the children still stand laughing at each other. Then suddenly they stop.

GEVHER. You mustn't think I'm laughing at you because you're funny. I'm laughing because you're nice. You don't chop heads off for that, do you?

FERDA. *Me* chop heads off! Well, I like that! . . . .

GEVHER. Well, that's what you do, don't you?

FERDA. I never chopped a head off in my life!

GEVHER. I didn't suppose you did it yourself. But you get somebody. That's just as bad. And another thing. I don't like the way you treat that poor little boy.

FERDA. I never treated a poor little boy! What boy?

GEVHER. You know what boy! And he must be quite tiny. Because you're not very big yourself.

FERDA. I'm bigger than you!

GEVHER. That's not big for a man. And what's more, I don't believe you're so very old either. I believe you are only a boy yourself.

FERDA. Well, you're only a girl!

GEVHER. That's what I like to be!

FERDA. Silly!

GEVHER. All right! If you want to *begin* crabby!

And she goes and sits below the fountain. So FERDA *goes above it to show that he is cross.*

FERDA. Looks don't tell anything. Lots of boys, if you could only read their hearts, are as old as old! Of course we are noble! We disguise it!

GEVHER. Yes, I know all about disguising! Oh! Perhaps if you change, you'll be an ogre! Wouldn't that be horrid?

FERDA. Change? . . . .

GEVHER. When we say the word! You know—the word that must never be spoken! Now you can't pretend you have forgotten that! Something awfully sweet! . . . .

This puzzles him so much, he has to come and look into her eyes.

FERDA. What's awfully sweet?

But she just won't say. She says instead:

GEVHER. You are. I like you.

FERDA. I like you too, really. Why is your hair so curly?

GEVHER. To make me look pretty. I have a flower in it also.

This makes him go very solemn, and he sits down by her side.

FERDA. D'you know . . . . I'm a funny fellow. All sorts of queer notions come into my head. You won't laugh if I tell you something?

GEVHER. Well, I can't promise. If it's funny, I may not be able to help it. Jokes often make me laugh.

FERDA. Oh, but it's serious! And really rather creepy! You'd hardly believe it; but *I always knew that it would be like this!*

GEVHER. What would?

FERDA. Why—this! You and me, you know! And in a garden, that's the odd part about it! With flowers and things around! And then there's your eyes! What makes them so blue?

GEVHER. I can't imagine! I have always had them that color.

FERDA. Yes, but why should I have dreamed them so?

GEVHER. Aren't you wonderful?

FERDA. Well, you see, I have to be! I'm a poet.

GEVHER. Are you? I adore poets! I can't say I ever met one before; but I adore them all the same.

FERDA. I knew you did. It is because you are soulful, sympathetic. Perhaps you are one yourself! You never know!

GEVHER. I'd like to be! But I'm afraid I'm not very good at my spelling.

FERDA. That's no matter! Mine's perfectly shocking, and I'm one! I'm lots of other things besides. I'm an adventurer, I'm a hero, I'm a revolutionist! Sometimes I'm a golden ragamuffin, the bane of kings, a price upon my head! That's what I am now. It's why I'm running away. What I am really though, is what they call a genius—you know, somebody awfully clever, who pierces to the heart of life and molds the world! You couldn't believe how lonely it all is! Of course, I never divulge a word of this to others, because they poke fun; and that always makes me mad. I'm frightful when I'm mad: I see pink! It's my favorite color. But somehow, you're different! I knew you were, the moment we met. I said straight off: "Here is my fate!" All the other girls are so . . . . Well, you know what girls are! And then, they laugh! You're different altogether! You seem to be fashioned out of different stuff! Rose-leaves! Or peach-blossoms perhaps! Something with honey in it! Perhaps you have been transformed and are really a trembling dewdrop, or a star, or a marvellous deep-sea pearl like your name.

GEVHER (*soberly*). I don't believe so. Though of course I may be different; I've never known any other girls. You are my very first boy also. And that was only because you got in over the wall.

FERDA. Then you must have been dreaming! Because there are loads of boys and girls down there. Grown-ups too, worse luck!

GEVHER (*shocked*). Oh, I never go down there! That's the Valley of Darkness!

FERDA. The city! Where the shops and the people are! Why do you call it that?

GEVHER. It just came, the way things do. And you see that big blue hill at the back of us with the gold on top of it? That's the Hill of Light.

After a moment she adds, awe-stricken:

There's somebody up there!

FERDA. Who?

GEVHER. I don't quite know. But he's very particular.

FERDA. Haven't you ever been to see?

GEVHER. No-o! It's millions of miles away! And what's more, there's the jungle in between! . . . . There's somebody in there too!

FERDA. Who?

GEVHER. I'd be afraid to say. But he's got a tail!

FERDA. What a lark! How do you go? Through that door?

GEVHER (*aghast*). I don't ever go! That is the door that must not be opened! Can't you see it's bolted?

FERDA. Well, you don't go there, and you don't go there, and you don't go there; where do you go?

GEVHER. I go here, in my own little garden, of course. It's where I've been going all my life.

FERDA. But didn't you ever want to run away? It's lots of fun! Tramping! Exploring! Anything! You know!

GEVHER. Oh, yes, I'm very often naughty!

FERDA. Who says it's naughty?

GEVHER. The grown-ups of course! Who else is there to say what's naughty?

FERDA. Yes, I know; they're always nagging at you! And when they don't nag, they threaten. That's why some of us *do* run away! When your old josser jaws *you*, does he threaten you with sepulchers?

GEVHER. My old what?

FERDA. Your father.

GEVHER. Oh, you mustn't mention *him!* Something dreadful will happen! He's one of the bubbles!

FERDA. No, really! Of course I don't want to be rude; but I'm afraid I don't quite remember who the Bubbles are.

GEVHER. Aren't you funny? Bubbles are not people! They're the things it's naughty to listen to, when the grown-ups are talking about them.

FERDA. Oh, those! I always listen!

GEVHER. So do I, sometimes; I can't help it! But it's naughty for all that!

FERDA. I like being naughty! Tell me about him!

GEVHER. My father! I dare not!

FERDA. Yes, you dare! Go on!

GEVHER. No! No! . . . . Well, I will tell this much. He's very particular! The most particular person there ever was! Perhaps he's even a bit more particular than *you!* The real you, I mean; not this one.

FERDA. How do you know he is?

GEVHER. Well, it came!

FERDA. There's hundreds of things that come and aren't true.

GEVHER. Well, this one *is* true! And he's a magician besides, and can make something or other out of nothing, I don't know what. And they want him badly, but he just won't come, because of whatever it was they did to him! And he's not alive, and he's not dead, and he can incognito *him*self too whenever he pleases; and he doesn't exist! Now *you* know what *that* means! What's more, he's a hero and an adventurer and a golden ragamuffin; and I'm not sure that he isn't a genius as well! And that's all I positively know about him!

FERDA. If he doesn't exist, where is he?

Gevher. That's the one mystery of life I cannot solve!

Ferda. Perhaps he's out there!

Gevher. My father doesn't live in a jungle! He's too particular! I shouldn't be surprised if he was a sultan himself, only a nice one, and sat on a throne all day long, eating candy! There's one thing very certain. He doesn't live here.

Ferda. Who does then?

Gevher. We do of course! Me and my uncles.

Ferda. Uncles! Do you live with uncles?

Gevher. Well, they're not real uncles, didn't you know that? They're the kind you call uncles because they're old and bald-headed and always around, and you have to.

Ferda. I don't care what kind they are, I'd be hanged if I'd have *uncle* grown-ups nagging at me! How many of the beasts have you?

Gevher. I must say, you have rather a faulty memory. Because I happen to know that you were talking with them only a short while ago.

Ferda. I don't remember talking with anybody's uncles!

Gevher. I see what it is! It's the incognito! Everything passes clean out of your mind the moment you change.

Ferda. Well, *that* rigmarole doesn't help me to remember!

Gevher. It's because you're not trying! Why, they come and see you every single day!

FERDA. Your uncles? Where? Anywhere near the—palace, for instance?

GEVHER. You're getting warmer! Try again! I'll help you! . . . .

She continues in a sing-song:

Three bald-headed gentlemen! One fat, one thin, one sort of loose! All persons of importance, all horribly old, all governing the country! And—their—names . . . .

She pauses to let the names sink in:

The Lords Habib, Shams, and Amr!

FERDA. What!

GEVHER. There! I knew you'd remember!

FERDA. Remember! What have those old windbags to do with you?

GEVHER. Why, they're my uncles; don't you understand? They brought me up! They taught me my naughties and my nicies, and everything I never want to do! You're not forgetting them again, are you?

FERDA. No; I remember Habib, Shams, and Amr! But by other names!

He starts up suddenly alert.

Good gracious, where are they? In there?

GEVHER. Oh, dear! . . . . Unless you brought them back with you, I suppose they're wherever it was they found you! When they came after you! You know!

FERDA. Ha! So *they're* after me also, are they?

GEVHER. They were. But of course, now you're here!

.... When they come, they've got something for you! Something nice to eat!

FERDA. Oh, vipers! I perceive their plot! When do they return?

GEVHER. What time did you tell them?

FERDA. *I* told them no time!

GEVHER. Then they'll be ages. They never hurry.

FERDA. Ages! So! Safe for the nonce! .... And you? Are you faithful?

GEVHER. Ferda, I would die for you!

FERDA. Good! .... Ages, you said. One little respite in my stormy life! And with you! Alone! In this fragrant paradise! *Gevher!* ....

> *He is so fervid she jumps up startled, and runs away to the top of the steps. This makes* FERDA *grow very bitter.*

Yes, they all of them do that! The moment they get to know me a bit!

GEVHER. What do they do?

FERDA. Forsake me! Shun me! Despise me!

GEVHER. Isn't that piggy of them! Come over here, and tell me about that too!

> *She sits, patting a place for him beside her. But he goes right over to the other end of the steps. So* GEVHER, *after a little thought about it, wriggles across to him. They are now perched like two little sparrows immediately above the valley.*

Is there anything the matter with you?

FERDA. Everything's the matter with me!

GEVHER. Whatever can be wrong?

FERDA. Everything's wrong! Life! The world! All the people in it! Especially girls!

GEVHER. That can't mean me then! Because I'm different! You said so yourself.

FERDA. Humph! After all, what can you expect in a place that's run by grown-ups?

GEVHER. Perhaps they don't know any better, poor things!

FERDA. They could know, if they'd only listen to us. But they're too wicked! They're worse than wicked; they're stupid! They never seem to learn anything! They're proud of their darkness! They like it! Even if you do bring them a light, they only try and puff it out! You were right, calling their silly old valley what you did just now. That's exactly what it is—darkness!

GEVHER. Well, I knew I was right. I generally am.

FERDA. There's something about their faces! It's written all over them! No wonder the muddle we are in, and faces like that managing the world! They're even proud of their faces! You can see them photographed in every newspaper! And the only way out of their muddle that they know is to start killing somebody! Mostly somebody younger than themselves! That's the beastliness of it!

GEVHER. Oh, so you own that! Now don't you forget!

FERDA. You bet I won't! *They* grumble about the Revolution! Who made the War? Who caused the Famine? Who ran the peace palaver? Grown-ups! And then they have the blazing cheek to blame *us* for the present rumpus! Don't you hate old people?

GEVHER. Isn't it rather naughty to hate?

FERDA. It depends upon the hate! And the people!

GEVHER. Oh, I see! That way!

FERDA. After all, you don't *have* to be a grown-up! Some of them avoid it! You can be as young as a newborn baby all your life, if you only try. Look at *me!* I'm not going to grow old myself, if I live till forty-eight!

GEVHER. Nor me! I'd much *rather* be young! I think it's nice!

FERDA. We're the sort of people who ought to run the world! Not grown-ups! People with a little more mind, and a little less common sense!

GEVHER. I think we'd manage very well.

FERDA. There'd at least be some "go" to it! And a great deal better fun! Are you one of us?

GEVHER. I don't know what it is; but I'm almost sure I am.

FERDA. Then you are one! It's the feeling counts in the beginning. Of course, we'd have to work. There'd be no getting out of that for anybody.

GEVHER. I wouldn't care! I can bake!

FERDA. And I told you some of the things I can do! But I can do lots more!

GEVHER. You'd have to. For one thing, you'd have to fetch in logs for the fire.

FERDA. I'd invent something wonderful to fetch in thousands at a time!

GEVHER. And I can sew, and I can spin, and I know how to take care of the garden. You'd dig. And I'm afraid you'll have to climb up after the apples also, because that's difficult.

FERDA. I'd love to! I'm good at gymnastics!

GEVHER. Then we shall have to see that there's always food ready. Not only pap either. And there must be plenty to go round.

FERDA. Well, *we* say that, you know! *And* clothes! *And* houses! *And* all the other things!

GEVHER. What's more, Mr. Greedy Pig needn't think he's going to take mine too! We must share and share alike!

FERDA. That's another of the things we say! Oh, you're one of us, all right! And to think! We shall be making a perfectly new earth! An earth for the young only! An earth where we shall be young, remain young, however old we are! Won't it be glorious?

GEVHER. It will be very nice.

FERDA. It will be like heaven! And we shall be the angels in it!

GEVHER. It will be like playing little house. You may hold my hand if you want to.

He does. And does. They are silent awhile.

Do they always marry one another after they have held hands?

FERDA. Always!

Gevher. I thought as much. Then as long as we avoid one thing, we can do so, and live happily ever afterward. Breakfast-time will be hardest for me, because I'm always sleepy then. I shall have to say "sweetie" instead.

Ferda. What's the one thing?

Gevher. The fatal one! I must never know you as you really are!

Ferda. Why, would that make any difference?

Gevher. I'm afraid so! I'm only fifteen! I'd have to be awfully horrid to love you as you really are! Now, wouldn't I?

Ferda. I don't see why. Of course, I might be better, worthier! . . . . Perhaps I *am* a bit wicked.

Gevher. Yes, I'm going to talk to you about your wickedness presently. But I didn't mean what you do; I meant what you are. Behind the disguise! You know! What you are down there!

Ferda. Oh! . . . . But a fellow can't be blamed for the way he's born! Besides, you know my views! I'm none too proud of who I am, I promise you!

Gevher. I should hope *not!* I don't want anything whose toe you have to touch with your head in *my* garden!

Ferda. Don't fear! The Revolution will spare you that! Anyway, *I* will! Don't you understand, I *prefer* being Ferda!

Gevher. That's promises then! You can't rub it out now, even if you wanted!

Ferda. But I won't want!

GEVHER. Very well, then! So long as the fatal word is never uttered . . . .

FERDA. There shan't be a syllable!

GEVHER. I'd hate to see you change! I couldn't bear it! I wish to have you always!

FERDA. I never change!

GEVHER. Oh! . . . . Perhaps, then, one of the other frightful things you do . . . .

FERDA. I won't do any of them! Look here! I'll be plain Ferda in your little garden as long as I breathe! I wouldn't change back again to the life I lived down there—not for fifty of their empires! No matter how big a pot I was!

GEVHER. Then I am yours! I will be faithful to you always, Ferda! I will be your little maid forever and ever. What are the other boys like?

He drops her hand suddenly.

FERDA. What! Why do you ask that *now?*

GEVHER. Because I want you to tell me exactly everything about the Crown Prince!

FERDA. But I can't tell you exactly everything about the Crown Prince! Now, can I?

GEVHER. But that's the very thing I wanted to talk to you about!

FERDA. And it's the very thing I've promised not to! Don't you understand?

GEVHER. I'm dreadfully afraid I do! It's because you are ashamed about him!

FERDA (*hotly*). No, I'm not either! He may be wicked; but he's not as bad as all that!

GEVHER. I didn't say *he* was! It's *you!*

FERDA. Well, I know it's me! But I haven't to say so, have I? Can't you see how difficult you are making it for me?

GEVHER. It's your own naughty fault! You're so obstinate!

FERDA. Haven't I vowed to have done with him? Haven't I sworn an oath to cut him out of my life forever?

GEVHER. That's just the wickedness of it! You're so cruel! After all, he's only a little boy!

FERDA (*now really angry*). He's *not* little!

GEVHER. Now it's no use excusing yourself! You know as well as I do how tiny he is! If there's one thing on earth I do dislike, it's weeny little boys having their heads cut off!

FERDA. You can't dislike it half as much as I do! Why do you suppose I've run away?

GEVHER. There's plenty of other punishments just as good! There's putting in a corner! There's sending to bed! There's locking you up in the cellar where the bogies are!

FERDA. All these have been done! That unhappy youth has suffered beyond the sufferings of all other boys!

GEVHER (*getting excited*). But why cut his head off? He can suffer lots more if you only keep him alive! Give him sums to do! Arithmetic's a fearful punishment! Give him prickly, woolly things to wear! Let him darn their old socks for them! Or I'll tell you a splendid one! If he's really very, very naughty and he likes his pap sweet, put salt in it instead of . . . .

She now loses her head completely;

There! You nearly made me say it! It's just like you! You're a nasty, horrid boy, and I hate you! I won't marry you, I won't, even if we *have* held hands; I won't, I won't! And I'll never speak another word to you as long as I live!

FERDA. Very well, then! That settles it! Remember, you did it first! Now I'll rub out *my* promises!

GEVHER. Ferda, you can't do that! You can't!

FERDA. Yes, I can too! And what's more, I'll do it out loud! I'll do it so loud they shall hear me all over the valley! And they can come and kill me if they please; I don't care! *I am the Crown Prince!*

GEVHER. Who?

FERDA. The Crown Prince!

Her terror passes as the night. Upon her face there dawns a sunshine of incredulous smiles.

GEVHER. Oh, you fib! You're not! You're the Sultan!

Now he begins to lose his head.

FERDA. How dare you call me "Sultan"? Didn't I tell you not to?

GEVHER. I dare do lots of things! Nibs! Nibs! There!

FERDA. Call me names again, and I . . . . I'll . . . . I don't quite know what yet; but it'll be something . . . . something so . . . .

GEVHER. You wouldn't know how! Nibs! Nibs! Nibbly-nibs!

FERDA. I know what I'll do! It's the most frightful thing I ever thought of in my life! It's terrific! It's dangerous! Perhaps I shall perish in the attempt! But I don't care! I have done with the world! Done with women! Done with everybody! So, I have chosen! Ha-ha, girls! Farewell, faithless one! Farewell, forever! And now forth, undaunted heart, upon thy perilous quest! Forth, forth to the jungle!

And he makes great strides for the archway.

GEVHER. No, you can't do that! I take it all back! Ferda! Ferda!

FERDA (*turning haughtily*). *Your Royal Highness the Crown Prince*, if you please!

GEVHER. I don't care what you are! You can be anything! Only don't open that door!

FERDA. I have sworn an oath! I cannot draw back now!

GEVHER. But there's a dragon outside!

He halts a moment, then says grimly:

FERDA. So much the better!

And he moves unwaveringly on.

GEVHER. Don't—do—it! Ferda! Crown Prince! Highness! If you do, I'll say the word! Yes, I will! I shall lose you forever! But it will be him he'll gobble up, not you!

FERDA *lets fall the heavy chain of the door. It clatters down ominously.*

Farewell, my beautiful Ferda, farewell! *Sugar!*

She hides her face. There is a long silence. From the other side of the door come three knocks and a voice crying:

VOICE. Let me in! Let me in!

FERDA. There's somebody there!

And he shrinks back a pace or two. GEVHER *draws nearer.*

VOICE. Let me in! Let me in!

FERDA. Shall I . . . .

GEVHER. No! It's *my* garden!

She moves to the door trembling.

Who is there? Did you want anything, please?

VOICE. Let me in!

FERDA. Do you think we had better?

GEVHER. We must. Something tells me I must.

She unbolts the door. Outside there stands a man, white-haired, turbaned, in tattered garments. His face is as the face of one who has overcome bitterness and death, and ascended to high places. He bears a basket, one long lean arm encircling it. It is JALAL. *He makes a step forward and is in the garden.* GEVHER *approaches him fearfully.*

Who are you—knocking—at my garden door?

JALAL *looks at her long and searchingly.*

JALAL. Nay, who are you, knocking at the door of my heart?

If required, the curtain may descend at this point, which is the end of the Second Act.

THE THIRD ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. JALAL *is by the door; the children below him, one on either side. The door stands open always after this.*

JALAL. Did they not tell you to expect me?

GEVHER. No, they never did.

JALAL. Did you not look for me yourself?

GEVHER. I don't quite know. You see, I wasn't properly certain anybody was out there. I only thought I thought it until now.

JALAL. I have been calling you a long time.

GEVHER. You!

JALAL. I!

GEVHER. Was that you? Are you the gentleman that whispered from the jungle the night my bunny-rabbit died?

JALAL. I am.

GEVHER. There, now! And they told me it was the dragon!

JALAL. I know. I am going to speak to them about it.

GEVHER. Then it was you that did the thunder and the lightning! It was *not* him roaring and spitting fire! How long have you been out there?

JALAL. Forever. Here, too! Everywhere! The blossoming of these roses was my handiwork.

GEVHER. I never saw you! Did you come in the night time?

JALAL. In the daytime. Walls cannot bar me out from gardens once beloved. Nor yet from bakehouses!

GEVHER. Oh! . . . . Then *you* must be a magician!

JALAL. Not for one moment! I work in the light!

GEVHER. But how can you do such things except by magic?

JALAL. By miracle. Just the ordinary simple power men live by—miracle.

GEVHER. Miracle! Then *that's* what it is!

JALAL. No more, my daughter! No less. So you are Gevher!

GEVHER. He knows that too! . . . . Can you tell me who *he* is?

FERDA. You needn't trouble him about me yet. Nice cheek, pushing into other people's gardens, and calling them their names without being introduced!

JALAL *looks at him, and he quails a little.*

Of course, I don't wish to be rude! But after all, you know, sir, you *are* a stranger!

JALAL'S *gaze travels back to* GEVHER.

JALAL. And—the woman! Did they tell you nothing about a woman?

GEVHER. A woman? . . . .

JALAL. Here in this garden. A woman, slim and fair, wide-eyed, and marvellously like you.

GEVHER (*troubled*). A woman! . . . .

FERDA. Look here, sir! Poking into other people's business . . . .

JALAL. Will you bring me a cup of water? I thirst.

GEVHER. Certainly! . . . .

And she goes wondering into the bakehouse.

JALAL *watches her out. Then he turns to* FERDA.

JALAL. Young sir, I do not know you in the raiment you have on.

FERDA. You are not intended to. This cloak is a disguise.

JALAL. It's the disguise I meant. It hides you completely. One might almost mistake you for a Crown Prince!

FERDA. Well, I am the Crown Prince!

JALAL. Pardon me, sir! Somebody far superior, I swear!

FERDA. You may swear what you like, I'm jolly well sure I'm nobody else!

JALAL. Ah, these cloaks! They conceal everything!

FERDA. I tell you, that's my name! Surely a fellow knows his own self!

JALAL. Never till he has been introduced!

And he leaves him thinking about it.

So! The garden of my dreams—the dreams that are forever coming true! My bakehouse! The flowers that store the honey for my bride-cakes! And here's the little fountain where we used to sit and give them living water!

He sits there now, placing his basket on the ground beside him. It is a big basket, covered by a cloth. GEVHER *re-enters with a cup.* FERDA *joins her, and they whisper together.*

FERDA. Isn't he rather queer? I don't know whether I like him! What do you think he is?

GEVHER. I don't think! I know!

FERDA. So do I! They always come disguised as beggars!

GEVHER. Really! I didn't know that!

FERDA. I did! I saw right through him at once! He's a spy!

GEVHER. I daresay he is! He's lots of things!

FERDA. Yes, but don't you understand? He's after *me!*

GEVHER. Oh! Then I'm sure he'll get you!

FERDA. Take care! He may get you too!

GEVHER. He doesn't have to. I belong already.

And she crosses to the fountain. She fills the cup, gives it to JALAL, *and sits down below him.*

JALAL. Ah! Done like a true water-bringer! . . . . Blessings, my daughter!

He drinks.

GEVHER. Was she an angel? Somebody who used to come and fold her wings around me when I was a baby?

JALAL. That was the woman.

GEVHER. Then she's under the willow-tree. They said *not!* But I saw them do it, out of the window. That's why I planted the willow.

JALAL. She was your mother.

GEVHER. There! I knew they never found me in an oyster! Of course, I know who *you* are! I didn't just at first; because I hadn't heard they came disguised as beggars. What's that for? Do you have to?

JALAL. Well now, *some* disguise is necessary, isn't it? No good coming openly, and making people blinder than they are!

GEVHER. Yes, but why beggars?

JALAL. Well, because they're emptier for one thing. Supposing I had come disguised as a person eating candy! I'd never have had this nice, cold water! You'd have taken me for a sultan, and given me sherbet—a beverage I never touch!

GEVHER. Couldn't you have come as somebody else?

JALAL. There is nobody else to be. There are only beggars and sultans. If you're not the one, you're bound to be the other.

GEVHER. Is that really so?

JALAL. At present. But we're altering it.

GEVHER. How many disguises will there be then?

JALAL. One.

GEVHER. Which?

JALAL. Neither.

GEVHER. I love you best as a beggar. I think you look pretty. And if you want me to, I will be your little maid forever and ever!

> FERDA *goes to the top of the steps, and sits as far away from them as he can.* JALAL *watches him with a smile.*

There's another thing. Even if you're not a sultan, you *are* a hero, aren't you? You have plenty of adventures, I'll be bound!

JALAL. All over the place! Up in the skies among the nourishing clouds, the suns; and down below, among the seedlings of the fostering earth! I'm a poet too! At least I hope so!

GEVHER. Are you what they call a genius?

JALAL. I should say so. Genius is my surname.

GEVHER. There! I said you were somebody very particular! Maybe you are one of these golden ragamuffins as well?

JALAL. The most glittering of them all! I really oughtn't to be left at large! I'm that golden, monarchs quake in their magnificent sandals when they only hear me mentioned.

> *This interests* FERDA *so much that he forgets he is being cross.*

FERDA. I have a question, sir! Are you one of us?

JALAL. I'm every one of you, right through!

FERDA. Do they scorn you, despise you, laugh at you? Do they make you see pink?

JALAL. I can show you scars on me now to prove it.

FERDA. Then I beg your pardon, sir! I thought you were after me.

JALAL. I am!

> FERDA *has been edging nearer, along the steps. He stops. Meanwhile,* GEVHER *is puzzling over something.*

GEVHER. There's just one other thing I wanted to know; but it isn't quite nice. I heard somebody say something about it today that sounded rather naughty!

JALAL. What is it, my daughter?

GEVHER. Well, it's this. Promise not to be offended! *Are you old?*

JALAL. What a question to ask! I'm a father! I've been nothing else for generations! Why, I fed your grandfather! And his grandfather before him! And so on back to the very beginning of grandfathers down the ages! It's perfectly scandalous, the amount of food we get through in our family!

GEVHER. That settles it then! You must be remarkably old!

JALAL. On the contrary, little Methuselah! I am remarkably young!

GEVHER. But if you've been having all those children, and for such a very long time . . . .

JALAL. That's partly why! But I'm young for other reasons too! Look at the stuff I make! And the moment I want it, mind you! I simply breathe the name of it, and it has to be; you can't stop it! Earth and hell can't stop it! Sultans can't; they've tried, and been winnowed away like chaff! Look at my joy! Every morsel I create sends thrills of life and laughter through mankind! There's another sign of youth for you! As for love! I love so fiercely that the entire oven of the universe is made fervid with the flame of it; and all the ripening cornfields tremble into being, before the blast and passion of its ecstasy! I'll tell you one thing, little lady! I'm younger than you!

GEVHER. Now, I know *that's* not true! Because I'm only fifteen!

JALAL. I'm not even that! I'm a baby! Less! I'm being born over and over again eternally! The very instant I appear, I vanish and begin anew; that's me! Don't you understand, I'm a father! That means somebody living in the future, the unborn; not the past, not now! Why, there are things I am fathering this second that won't be seen till people grow eyes in their heads! And can't you see the fun of it? Never to arrive anywhere! Always going! Always getting along! And the secret is, I never *have* to arrive! I'm always there!

GEVHER. Where?

JALAL. Everywhere!

FERDA (*to himself*). I'm beginning to understand this man. He's like me!

GEVHER. Of course, it's naughty contradicting; but I'm sure there's a mistake somewhere. If you're so young, why is your hair white? Wait a moment—I've not done! Then you have a grown-up voice. Also you use very difficult grown-up words sometimes.

JALAL. Oh, now I see what's troubling you! You're thinking of the disguise! I've been talking all this time about myself!

FERDA. I do that too, sir! Often!

JALAL. It's good fun, isn't it? If you know how! And don't get lost among the disguises! Do you know, I have more fun out of my disguises than almost any other thing I make. People take them so seriously. They actually *believe* in white hairs!

GEVHER. I honestly don't see what you mean! You're not at all easy.

FERDA. I see what he means! He means exactly what I meant just now, when I said you don't *have* to be a grown-up.

GEVHER. Oh! That way!

FERDA. Of course! You mustn't mind her, sir! She's a girl! And girls find our kind of talk awfully hard to understand. Here's a question for you, sir. I've been puzzling over it ever since you mentioned it a minute or two ago. How many times a day are you born, sir?

JALAL. Well now, that depends. Better say—infinitely. Of course, when they kill me, I'm always born again much quicker, and very much more frequently. There's nothing like it for surviving.

FERDA. Oh, so they kill *you* too, do they?

JALAL. Every blessed time I come!

FERDA. Isn't that like them! When were you killed last, sir?

JALAL. A second ago, in a temple on the other side of the globe. Ah, there again! It was in a court of justice that time! They are preparing to kill me here today.

GEVHER. Isn't that naughty of them? What for?

JALAL. The usual reason. For bringing them bread.

> FERDA *leaps to his feet. He is by this time about the middle of the steps.*

FERDA. Bread! Do you bring bread?

JALAL. A basketful. And there's more multiplying behind.

FERDA. Bread! Why that's the stuff they're hungering for down there! We've been searching for it for years! It's the slogan of the Revolution: "Bread for everybody! Bread for the world!" But is it true? Will you swear it? Is it really bread you bring?

> *He is now up in the garden at the feet of* JALAL, *looking up eagerly into his face.*

JALAL. My son, I swear it by the light of yonder hill.

GEVHER (*puzzled*). "Bread for everybody! Bread for the world!" What is bread? Is it something to eat?

FERDA. Bread! Did you never hear what bread was?

GEVHER. No, I never did.

FERDA. Why, it's the stuff people used to eat before the Empire! Real people, you know—poets, heroes, adventurers, when there wasn't any need of golden ragamuffins! It was bread that made them what they were! It made them wise, it made them beautiful, it made them strong! They built workshops out of it, gardens, houses to live in! They built temples even; and the men that made the bread, the bakers, were worshipped in them! Then when the Empire came, and the merchants and the massacres, there were ordered dumplings instead! Afterward pap! And that's where we are today!

GEVHER. I must say, I'm not very fond of pap myself!

FERDA. Nobody is, except a pack of old mumblers without teeth in their heads! The people are sick of it! They want bread! Don't you see, that's the reason for the Revolution! Bread means life! Life for everybody! It's the food that keeps you young! With bread inside us we can do anything! We can transform the Empire! We can create a new world! A world for the young! And to think that here it is at last! At our very doors! I've read about it lots of times! I've even been told about it by the scribes of the temple; but the books were so garbled and the scribes such liars, I never properly believed in it till now!

GEVHER. Where is it? Is it in that basket?

JALAL. Five loaves of it.

GEVHER. Only five for all those people?

JALAL. It's my usual number. Five divides out best.

GEVHER. And they're in there! May I peep?

JALAL. Not yet. You might not recognize them. They are disguised.

GEVHER. When are you going to give them to the people?

JALAL. As soon as they are hungry.

There is a pause. Then GEVHER *says breathlessly:*

GEVHER. What are they like? Are they little warm, brown things?

JALAL. These are. I bring different kinds for different uses. I bring them common bread for their daily life; cakes for their joy; and this kind, which is holy, to make them young forever.

FERDA. Is that the kind you live on yourself?

JALAL. I live on bread I couldn't even explain to you.

GEVHER. Is it sweet?

JALAL. Passing sweet.

GEVHER. Is there innocency in it?

JALAL. It is mingled therewith.

FERDA. Where does it come from?

JALAL. Above.

FERDA. Yes, but I mean the bakehouse. Where is it made?

JALAL. In yonder hill.

GEVHER. Who makes it?

JALAL. I.

FERDA. You! Are you a baker?

JALAL. I am. A master one.

GEVHER. You! Are you a man they used to build temples to, and worship?

JALAL. They called it worship.

FERDA. Well, then, in the name of heaven, who are you?

JALAL. I am Jalal, the breadmaker.

FERDA. Jalal! Jalal's dead!

JALAL. I was. And am alive.

GEVHER. Jalal! Who's Jalal? Aren't you my father?

JALAL. I am.

FERDA. He's the father of all of us! He is one of us! He's a ragamuffin! Oh, I am beginning to awake! I have been blind, wicked, a fool! I have played with make-believes like a prince! But I am changing! I am changing fast! Look, sir! I strip myself of my disguise! I am yours! I may not yet be wide awake! I may not know myself! But I know you! You are mine! You are my master! Master, take me! Make of me what you will! But let me serve you always!

JALAL. I will. You shall be my *chela*, my disciple.

FERDA *sinks on his knees before him.*

Blessings, my son! . . . . Now I know my secret shall not die. I have looked for you. By the light of all the hills of heaven, you shall not leave me unrewarded! Harkee, child! I will make a baker of you!

FERDA. A baker! I! Oh, bread for the world!

A brazen gong booms from the bakehouse.

GEVHER. Here they come! Father! Ferda! . . . .

JALAL. So be it! All is ready.

If required, the curtain may descend at this point, which is the end of the Third Act.

THE FOURTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. The gong sounds again. GEVHER *turns; and unobserved by her,* JALAL *and* FERDA *slip behind the fruit-tree. Then the counsellors are heard patrioteering within:*

OMNES. Toodle-oodle-oo! Sultan! Lord of the four empires and the weal and wealth thereof! Lord of the empires of the north and of the south and of the east and of the west! Lord of the whole world! Sultan! Toodle-oodle-oo! Sultan! Toodle-oodle-oodle-oodle-oo! Sultan!

They scuttle in hindforemost like allegiant crabs, waving their wands of office and bobbing up and down. The object of these venerations resembles a fabulously old and prosperous toad. It is the SULTAN.

His Majesty sweats. He is palpably agitated. His crown sits slightly agog. His sceptre dangles limply from his clammy but puissant paw. The lord of the four empires and the weal and wealth thereof is not drunk. He is simply scared.

SULTAN. Oh, that hill! Oh, those ragamuffins! That last popgun nearly did for me! I know I shall die! Stop bobbing! This is no time for ceremony!

OMNES. We obey, dread Lord!

But they still keep on doing it.

SULTAN. Enough to give a fellow heart disease! The scoundrels! My beautiful palace turned into a nursery! The infanticides! My temple fumigated! Infidels! And playgrounds all over the city! (*Snivelling.*) It is unkind of them! Stop bobbing! Are we safe up here?

AMR. Unquestionably, Sire! In this flowery refuge, you may abide the fortunes of your loyal troops below there, without one jot of danger.

SULTAN. No golden spies about? No rebel ambush?

AMR. My liege, my life upon it! Saving ourselves, this pleasance is unpeopled.

SULTAN. We breathe more freely! Don't bob! Where's this girl?

SHAMS. Puissant, she awaits your pleasure, humbly. Come, Gevher, say your *Toodle-oodle-oo's!*

GEVHER. I won't! It's silly! Who *is* the funny old man?

SULTAN (*screaming*). Funny! Seize that traitorous child! Off with her head!

SHAMS. Pardon, Sire; I can remedy! Gevher, behave! I'm perfectly shocked! Don't you know, this is the nice, kind Sultan come to see you?

GEVHER. The Sultan!

> *Open-mouthed, she finds her* FERDA *vanished. "Oh!" she says, and makes a dash for His Majesty.*

You naughty, wicked boy! That's what you go and do, do you? You little sneak! I've half a mind to give you a right-down good shaking!

SULTAN. Oh, here's another of them! Go away, you baggage! Go away!

GEVHER. I won't! I hate you, you're horrid! Just when we were getting along so nicely too! I *will* shake you!

And she does, most vigorously.

SULTAN. Murder! Outrage! Nationalized women! Keep your claws off my sacred person, you scratch-cat! You—*you*, poltroons, do something! Oh, for my trusty guard!

He flounders to a seat. Meantime the counsellors bob and bustle with prodigious unavail.

SHAMS. There seems to be a trifling misconception somewhere.

SULTAN (*whimpering*). I won't rule them any more, I won't! They can keep their beastly coal mines! They can keep their oil wells! They can build their old theatres and schools! I hope they'll starve; I hope they'll be blockaded! I won't help them! I'll go away, I will, and play croquet! I'll pick daisies! I'll show them! Did you get that gold shipped safely from the palace?

AMR. Most Awful, even now the imperial camels trudge majestically with it across the borderland.

SULTAN. And our Sunday-best regalia? Was it ever packed?

AMR. Sire, it lies secreted in the deepest ashbin of the Dust Commission.

GEVHER. What's regalia?

SULTAN. Why is that whelp still squeaking? Did we or did we not command her instant execution?

GEVHER. We did! But you needn't think I am afraid of you! I'm not afraid of any silly boy! So there!

SULTAN. The reptile flouts me! Habib! Amr! Don't stand flapping there! Where's your fealty? Decapitate the brat!

GEVHER. You'd better not! If you do, I'll scream!

AMR. The fact is, Your Majesty, our facilities for decapitation at this moment . . . .

SULTAN. You bandy words! Think you to quench the imperial wrath with prating? Pour me forth her blood! Bones of my ancestors, can't I have a little joy to slake mine ire? Her blood, I say! Despatch!

AMR. It's no go, fellows! Come, all together! Like gentlemen!

They cavort like chimpanzees, grimacing horribly, and closing in upon GEVHER.

GEVHER. Don't do it! I'll scream! I'll scream! Ferda, they're making faces at me! Oh! . . . .

She screams. FERDA, *restrained by* JALAL *hitherto, now bursts from his hiding place.*

FERDA. Unhand her, aged villains! The girl is mine!

They retire backward, bobbing obsequiously.

SULTAN. What do I behold? My son!

OMNES. The Crown Prince!

FERDA. Not so, vile counsellors! No son of yours, proud monarch! But Ferda, the baker's boy, prince of the nourishing batches, and a golden ragamuffin!

SULTAN. Another of them! And more behind those bushes, I'll be bound! Oh, it is unkind!

Again he seeks the solace of the seat.

GEVHER. You came just in time! I very nearly made a mistake! But you can't be both at once, that's positive!

FERDA. Did they fright you, child?

Gevher. Well, not because of my head! It's people making faces at me, I don't like!

Ferda. I will requite the outrage!

The counsellors blench. Then bob.

Leave that fooling, caitiffs!

He then turns sternly toward the Sultan, *chiding him also:*

Father, stop blubbing! Pull yourself together! Be a boy!

Sultan. I won't be a boy! I'm too broken-hearted! I will blub! Haven't fathers any rights? To think that I should live to see my white hairs flouted by a thankless child! Boo-ooh! And after all I've done for you! Didn't I beget you, you unnatural little beast? Boo-oo-ooh! You're just like your mother! You're none of my family! All this comes of Rabia's indulgence! That and bad companions! Atheists, free-lovers, ragtag, and bobtail! And who *is* the girl anyway? Immoral little minx! Boo-oo-ooh! If I had spoken to my father as you have spoken to me today, I believe he would have strangled me! Poor old Dad, little did he dream the grandson he should curse me with! Boo-ooh! And now my gold's gone galloping off to those bandits of the borderland, and my regalia to the Dust Commission! I shall never see either again!

Ferda. Father, chuck it! You're irritating me! You're getting on my nerves!

Sultan. Haven't I the right to get on your nerves? You're my child! Have you *no* feelings? Are parental tears of no more avail in the world? Can't you see the pathos of them? Why, I'm your best friend, boy; I'm your father; I begat you! Boo-oo-ooh!

FERDA. Well, I like your jolly cheek! Begat me! Who's been doing his best to kill me every blessed moment for the last two years? You! Who put prices upon my head, dead or alive? You!

SULTAN. Only to preserve the Empire! Surely a father has the right to make such sacrifice to preserve empires! What's the matter with everybody? In the good old days of your ancestors, boys liked it! Look at the excitement of it, the adventures!

FERDA. But, I tell you, we don't want your silly old empires! We're fed up with popguns and pea-shooters!

SULTAN. But you can't be fed up with them! People always have to want empires! It's the sanctified custom of the ages! Look at the profits they bring in!

FERDA. We don't want profits! We want life!

SULTAN. Listen to him! They don't want profits—they don't want empires; they want life! What will they ask for next? Paradise? Oh, they're so unkind!

GEVHER. It's your own fault for being so naughty!

SULTAN. Asphyxiate that Jezebel!

GEVHER. I don't know what it is; but you'd better not! And I'm no more that funny name you called me than you are! If as much! There! We're not afraid of him, are we, Ferda?

FERDA. I should jolly well say not! Nor of his minions yonder!

SULTAN. Oh, bludgeons of my forebears! Blood, blood, blood!

GEVHER. I'll tell him some more, I will! I'll teach him swearing before little girls of fifteen! You're a bad, wicked old man! You shall be put to bed in the dark, you shall! You shall do sums! You shall have salt in your pap!

SULTAN. You shan't even have pap! I'll make you scraggier than you are! I'll starve you to death!

GEVHER. No you won't neither! And I don't want any more pap, thank you! We've done with pap, haven't we, Ferda?

FERDA. That we have! And dumplings! Who wants imperial dumplings when there's living bread to be had?

SULTAN. Bread! Hearken to the fool! Bread! I hope you may get it!

FERDA (*eagerly*). We've got it! Haven't we, Gevher?

GEVHER. Five big hunks! More too, perhaps! But that's a secret!

SULTAN. Oh, they torture me! Bread, blood, bread! Pluck out their gibing tongues!

GEVHER. Bread isn't a torture! It's nice! It makes you strong and happy! Doesn't it, Ferda?

FERDA. Ra-*ther!* We're going to make workshops out of it, houses, gardens! Aren't we, Gevher?

GEVHER. Ra-*ther!* And temples! We're going to put bakers inside, to say our prayers to!

FERDA. And people! A lot of new ones, nice ones, young ones! We've done with the old!

SULTAN. Oh, blood! Give me blood! And I die content!

FERDA. Oh, bread! Give us bread! And we live forever! You remember our slogan, Gevher? . . . .

GEVHER. Yes, yes, let's sing it for him! . . . .

BOTH. "Bread! Bread! Bread for everybody! Bread for the world!"

And they repeat it, doing a joyous little romp to the rhythm.

SULTAN. Oh, shambles! Massacres! Gore! Where's my trusty guard?

GEVHER. Look! He's getting awfully interested! Let's do it for him again!

And they do so, the SULTAN *meanwhile foaming and gasping for his favorite liquid.*

SHAMS. I've a brilliant idea! Bread! May it please Your Majesty . . . .

SULTAN. It doesn't please My Majesty! Curse your idea!

AMR. But, Sire, our policy . . . .

SULTAN. Perish your policy! It was your policy and Shams's elephantine gluttony trapped me to this den! I believe you're privy with them! "Flowery refuge!" "No jot of danger!" Why, the whole place swarms with vipers! Which of you bright intellects informed me coming up that life was but a dream? That there was nothing anywhere but gibbering, empty wind?

HABIB (*sycophantically*). That was me, Your Majesty; your trusty Habib!

SULTAN. Then you're the champion Ananias of the universe! Are they nothing? Isn't *he* something, that serpent there, my son? That fanged and venomous asp of female sorcery beside him, isn't *she* something? And heaven only knows how many more of the brood are lurking in the garden! Ha-ha! Fool that I was, not to perceive your perfidy! This is their nest, their lair, their secret hiding place! It's where they hatch their plots! The ground's alive with them! I can feel them all around me! . . . . (*Screaming.*) Ah! There's another of them! . . . .

OMNES. Where?

SULTAN. There, there, blindworms; use your eyes! Behind you! The big fellow! . . . .

They turn; and there is JALAL, *his back toward them. They whisper hoarsely:*

OMNES. Who is it?

SULTAN (*more hoarsely*). I don't know. Ascertain.

AMR. Shams, you!

SHAMS. Habib, you!

HABIB. I'm absent!

SULTAN. Must the thunder of our voice imperial reverberate again? (*Weakly.*) Ascertain!

AMR *approaches gingerly and touches* JALAL. *He turns. The counsellors drop their wands of office and fly howling down the steps, where they crouch,* HABIB *uppermost,* SHAMS *next,* AMR *at the bottom. The* SULTAN *stands petrified. The kids look on with gleeful grins. It is the game of their lives. There is a pause.*

HABIB. Don't you believe it, Sultan! He's not there!

SULTAN. Isn't he? Then what's that?

SHAMS. There isn't a that! He's no baker, that thing!

AMR. Besides, even if he were, he's dead! You signed the mandate; so he must be!

HABIB. Dead, fiddlesticks! He never was! He's a fake, a delusion!

SULTAN. I live again! Only let's all say it together, very loudly, to make sure!

AMR. Sire, we do your sacred bidding! Gentlemen of the Privy Council! May it please Your Majesty . . . .

OMNES (*rising*). He's a fake, a delusion! He's not there! He never was!

And they point at the place where he isn't.

JALAL. Liars! I am.

They howl and crouch as before. There is another pause.

HABIB. Don't lose heart, Nibs! That was the wind gibbering. There wasn't a word spoken! Come, you fellows, chip in!

BOTH. There wasn't a word spoken!

HABIB. Now, once again, unanimously! To it, Sultan! World, flesh, devil, and the lord of the four great empires all at once, we ought to carry it!

OMNES (*rising*). There wasn't a word spoken!

JALAL. Liars! I have spoken a word! A word that makes bread!

OMNES. There is no bread!

JALAL *takes a loaf from his basket, and puts it on the fountain wall. They watch him uncomfortably.* GEVHER *gives a little cry of recognition.* JALAL *then proceeds with an ominous calm:*

JALAL. Habib is familiar, I believe, with a process known to his peculiar world as winding up the business. It relates, I gather, to the triviality called "bankruptcy." We are about to perform such a ceremony now. Only ours is the winding up of an age.

SULTAN. What age, pray?

JALAL. Yours.

AMR. What do you propose putting in its place?

JALAL. Ours. You know, we have been very good-humored with you. We have suffered you a long time.

FERDA. I should say we jolly well have!

GEVHER. Ra-*ther!*

They all begin puffing like turkey-cocks.

JALAL. Now, no apoplexy, please! We can manage this affair quite decently, if we don't all lose our heads. Obsequies are always rather trying; but we really can't have corpses fussing at their own funerals. Sit down.

SULTAN. I will not sit down, sir!

The counsellors add their refusals:

OMNES. Nor I!

JALAL (*thunderously*). Sit down!

And they do so with a mild snorting.

SULTAN (*feebly*). But I don't want to sit down. I'm not comfortable. Well, go on! . . . .

For JALAL *is regarding him intently.*

JALAL. I am wondering. Of course there is a way out for you, if you only had the wisdom to take it. But I know you won't! And it's so simple!

SULTAN. Wh-what is it?

JALAL. Grow young again! Strip off your disguise! Become one of us!

SULTAN. Never! I'd rather plunge into the oblivion of yonder jungle!

OMNES. There speaks our noble Sultan! Toodle-oodle-oo!

SULTAN. Before I yield, I will perish, I and all my empires with me!

OMNES. Toodle-oodle-oodle-oodle-oo!

SULTAN. I'll taste perdition first!

OMNES. So will we!

JALAL (*quietly*). Then your doom is sealed; you shall! And the dragon is particularly hungry at the ends of ages!

HABIB. There is no dragon, see! That was only Amr's invention!

JALAL. No dragon! I have met him face to face!

SHAMS. Out there! A real, live dragon!

JALAL. An unreal, dead one! Once lost amidst those dark writhings and the slippery horror of those dread coils and curlings, *you'll* find him lively enough!

HABIB. We don't believe it! Come, boys, thinking does it! . . . .

OMNES. There is no dragon!

JALAL. So be it!

His voice becomes vibrant with command.

Golden ragamuffins, are you armed and ready?

GEVHER. Oh, he means us! Quick, Ferda!

They pick up two of the wands and stand at attention.

BOTH. We are armed and ready!

JALAL. What think ye? Has the hour yet come? Are your souls resolved?

BOTH. We are resolved!

JALAL. And the danger! Reck ye of the danger? Or are ye this day pledged to fling your glorious youth into the fray, to free yourselves, your children, and the future of the world forever?

BOTH. We reck not danger! We are pledged!

They shine like angels. They kiss their wands.

JALAL. Well yapped, my whelps of war! Ye strain the leash, most puplike! An if I slip you, how far forward, think ye, will your valor hurl you?

BOTH. To the uttermost!

And they lift their wands aloft.

JALAL. Then first behold yon counsellors! World, flesh, and devil, there they stand convict, hell's triple treachery!

Ay, tremble, miscreants! Even now, the dragon from his deadly sleep uncoiling waits you in the jungle! Behold them, comrades! These be the Privy Council of the four great empires! The vanity of riches, the blindness of desire, and the lie! Behold them well! Dogs of mongrel breed, they plot, and from the dawn of time have plotted, against your youth! They loathe it with the rank spleen of cankerous decrepitude and death! These be they that live, whilst ye lie slain! These be they of goodly raiment and of headgear climbing to the clouds, that doom your little brothers yonder to a life of shivering nakedness! These gorge themselves on cakes and candy whilst you pine on pap! Rob you of your loves, your games, your merrymakings in a world create of rapture; and set you down to sums! Old men! Think of it! Tradesmen! Cut-throats! Arithmeticians! Dead hands clutching at the heart of living youth! Shall this be, comrades? Behold them, children of the daybreak, and then ring out your answer! Kids or grown-ups, which? Bread or empires? Shall their compact with the powers of darkness stand, or this day perish everlastingly?

BOTH. Perish! We have sworn it!

JALAL. Then—off with their hats!

BOTH. Holla! Holla! Holla!

And leaping like young greyhounds, in three fell thwacks of their fierce wands, the high hats of Empire are no more. The counsellors, bald-headed and abased, whine like rabbits on the steps, their power broken forever.

The children line up their disordered ranks, flourish their wands, and triumph to heaven:

Hey-diddle-diddle! Bread for everybody!

FERDA. Was it well done, my master?

JALAL. Most doughtily, my son!

GEVHER. I helped too, didn't I? I'd have done more, only Uncle Amr made faces at me!

JALAL. Daughter, you helped valiantly! . . . . Now bid them rise, conduct them safely, and range them against yon wall.

> FERDA *salutes and motions* GEVHER *to the opposite side. She does not understand; so he puts her into position, disposes her wand aright, and returns to his own post.*

FERDA. My prisoners, rise!

> *They won't.* FERDA *attempts a tiny thunder of his own:*

Stand up!

AMR. I don't want to!

SHAMS. My head's aching!

HABIB. Go away! I'm not here!

> *The children don't know how to deal with this.*

FERDA. What do we do now? They won't play!

GEVHER. Oh, please be nice kind prisoners and get up! We can't go on, if you don't!

OMNES. Never!

GEVHER. They say "Never," father! Make them!

JALAL (*thunderously*). Stand up!

And they do so. They are conducted safely to the jungle wall. There with hangdog faces they miserably await their further doom, the children guarding them.

GEVHER. That did them, didn't it, Ferda?

FERDA. Ssh! He's seeing pink! He's gathering his wrath!

For JALAL *stands eyeing the* SULTAN *with the menace of an outraged lion.*

JALAL. And now for this monarch! This lord of mountebanks, this mockery of gold and gewgaws! We shall soon strip him of *his* disguise! Comrades, guard him right and left!

The children march down and do so, standing at attention.

Next, with due and regal ceremony, bid him rise.

FERDA. Sultan of the four empires—the empires of the north and of the south and of the east and of the west, I bid you rise! Hey-diddle-diddle! Bread for everybody! Sultan, come into the court!

SULTAN. Well, I won't, not for you nor anybody! There! I'm more comfortable as I am!

FERDA. You'll jolly well have to! Father, behave yourself! You're spoiling everything! What's more, he's looking at you!

GEVHER. And you know what I said about salt in your pap!

SULTAN. Venomous asp! Oh, it is unkind!

JALAL. We trifle time! (*Thunderously.*) Stand up!

And he does so.

SULTAN (*querulously*). Why do I have to stand up? Can't you do me sitting down? I've got vascular corns!

JALAL. Ragamuffins! . . . .

BOTH. Command us, master! We obey!

JALAL. First then, from off his brow remove that golden lie; and from his hand yon bauble!

SULTAN. I won't have my crown and sceptre removed! Why must they remove my crown and sceptre?

JALAL. Because the vanities they signify are this moment passing to destruction.

SULTAN. If you mean my palace, you can keep it! You and your squalling kids! I've another place to go to!

JALAL. You have, and swiftly too!

SULTAN. And my gold's safe! Er! That's far, far away by now!

JALAL. So far, its value vanishes forever!

SULTAN. My regalia then!

JALAL. Mere dust already!

SULTAN. That's all you know! My trusty guard will see to that! They'll see to you too! They're down there, waiting for you!

JALAL. They shall not be disappointed! Come, comrades, despatch!

SULTAN. I won't, I won't, I won't have my crown snatched from me! Give me back my sceptre! (*Anemically.*) Blood, blood, blood!

JALAL. Bring hither, boy!

FERDA *does so.* JALAL *places crown and sceptre beside the loaf of bread.*

Regard them closely, Ferda, and remember! And they preferred this!

He taps the crown contemptuously.

FERDA. I will remember, master! Nay, I swear it!

JALAL. Then to your post! We will conclude this business.

FERDA *salutes and returns to the* SULTAN.

FERDA. We await your bidding, master!

JALAL. Then, unmask that monster! Strip him bare! Tear off the last disguise, and show this lord of Empire as he really is!

They whisk away his trappings, and he stands revealed a thing of death and moldering bones.

Now, forth to the jungle, traitor! Thou and thy council with thee!

SULTAN. I won't go to the jungle! Habib, Shams, Amr, don't bob, save me! Save me, somebody! I won't be gobbled up by dragons! I'll be revenged! Oh, for my youth again! Where's bread? Bread! Bread!

JALAL. Behold me!

SULTAN. I call not you, fool! I call for bread!

JALAL. Behold me, fool and bread alike! Fool from yonder hills of glory! Bread of an immortal baking!

SULTAN. Liar! Infidel! Blasphemer! Your bread is poison! Your folly is the mirthless laugh of hell! What say you, my brothers, in this burning agony?

Omnes. His bread is poison! He lies, blasphemes!

Sultan. It is dragon's bread! Not His of yonder hills!

Omnes. *His* is the true bread! It is holy bread! Bread of Paradise!

Sultan. Let us go seek Him! He is ours! We are His! He will avenge us!

Omnes. He will breathe slaughter! He will send fire upon them! Fire and brimstone!

Sultan. Curses upon your new young world! Murrain seize it! Pestilence and abomination abide upon it always! Come, ye company of true believers! Forward to the One and Only Baker! He is ours! We are His! He'll let them know! He will reward them in their iniquity!

Omnes. He is ours! We are His! He'll let them know! He will reward them in their iniquity!

They pass chanting through the archway. They cease suddenly. There comes a long low rumbling from the jungle.

Ferda. Shall I close the door, master!

Jalal. There is no need. They return no more.

Ferda. But I meant—the dragon!

Jalal (*smiling*). I'm the dragon!

They approach him curiously, one on either side.

Gevher. But you're my father!

Ferda. But you're my baker!

Jalal. I *am*. Somebody else too! And now I suppose you'll be asking "Who's he?"

Both. Yes, tell us!

Jalal. *I* am.

Gevher. But how can you be?

Jalal. Because I Am.

Gevher. Well, I said you were somebody very particular! But I never suspected you were so many particular somebodies all at once!

Ferda. I know! It's your adventures! They'd spot you in a second, if you didn't come somebody else every single time!

Jalal. However did you guess that?

Ferda. Well, you see, master, *I* disguise myself and have adventures too!

Jalal. That reminds me! There's one waiting for me now.

Gevher. Where?

Jalal. Down yonder. Didn't I tell you? I have to die again shortly.

Both. Die again? . . . .

Jalal. Yes, isn't it jolly?

Gevher. But you needn't any more! The Sultan's done for! He's all bones!

Jalal. Oh, there's a bit of him left yonder! Trusty guard, you know!

Ferda. Jolly to die! I think it's perfectly awful! How can you possibly call it jolly?

JALAL. Well, I don't mean just ordinary dying! I've not had much experience of that! It's when they kill you! That's where the fun comes in!

GEVHER. Isn't he dreadful? Where's the fun?

JALAL. In being born again, of course! You might perish as they do, if they didn't keep on killing you so frequently! Killing you gives you a new lease of life immediately! Don't you understand: the more they kill, the more you come! Kill you once, you're back in a jiffy! Twice; and you're there more than ever—multitudes of you! Thrice; and you're innumerable hosts! I *told* you! You really must remember these simple little truths, or you'll never be *golden* ragamuffins!

FERDA. Yes, but why do they want to kill you?

JALAL. For bringing them bread! Must I repeat everything twice over? They always kill you when you bring them bread!

GEVHER. What would they do if you started killing them?

JALAL. Make me a sultan, of course!

FERDA. But it's all so jolly beastly and abominable! Doesn't it make your heart bleed?

JALAL. Invariably! Look here! . . . .

He bares his breast. What they see there strikes them dumb with awe.

You get used to it. They've done it so often, I think I'd rather miss it, if they failed me this time. But here, I can't sit chattering with little magpies all day long; I have my job to do! Be good; don't quarrel; remember all I told you! Where's my basket?

FERDA. Here, master! Oh, I love you! I will be faithful to you always!

GEVHER. Me, too! But it's awful solemn, isn't it?

JALAL. Not a bit of it! It's life! It's the way bread's made! And bread's the jolliest stuff there is! So! . . . .

He claps the loaf back, hoists his basket, and descends to the valley. He turns once to wave farewell:

So long, kids!

BOTH. So long!

And he passes through the valley of darkness, singing:

JALAL. Bread! Bread! Bread though you starve me! Love though you hate me! Life though you slay me! Bread! Bread! Bread for everybody! Bread for the world!

The children stand hand in hand up above in the garden watching him.

If required, the curtain may descend at this point, which is the end of the Fourth Act.

THE FIFTH ACT

The Scene and the Situation remain unchanged. The children still stand hand in hand gazing over the valley.

GEVHER. It doesn't seem quite real, does it?

FERDA. Really real things seldom do. I've often noticed it. And things that do seem so are really never really real at all.

GEVHER. That is so. Oh, isn't it nice?

They wake as from a dream and hug joyfully saying "Oo!" Then they sit down at the fountain.

FERDA. Didn't he give them gyp?

GEVHER. Ra-*ther!* And wasn't that funny when we took his teagown off him and showed his bones? I suppose he'll be gobbled up by now.

FERDA. That he will! Your father's going to be killed too!

GEVHER. Well, we know *that's* not really real! Because he's coming alive again the moment afterward. I wonder whether your father's coming alive again also.

FERDA. That's one of the things I really don't know.

GEVHER. I don't think he'd better, do you? Of course, if my father was the dragon, he did the gobbling; and I'm positive such a very particular person would make sure.

FERDA. That's all right then; mine's gobbled. Only I didn't see yours eating anything, did you?

GEVHER. Not with his mouth. He was too busy talking all the time!

FERDA. I know how it is! My father wasn't a really real father at all! He was only a pretend. After all, we only had his word for it, and he was an awful old story-teller! Well, if he was only a pretend, it stands to reason he couldn't be eaten! What's more, he *really* never was; and therefore he can never come alive again to plague us.

GEVHER. Very well, then, that's that! And now another thing! When is *he* coming back?

A glow appears in the jungle.

FERDA. Do you mean *your* father?

GEVHER. Of course! We've done with yours.

FERDA. Well now, I can't quite say. Do you think he's alive again already?

GEVHER. Well, if he's dead, he must be! He said the moment afterward.

FERDA. Then that settles that! We may expect him almost any time! For all we know, he may be here now.

GEVHER. But I don't see him, do you? I don't see a sign of him anywhere.

The glow in the jungle deepens.

FERDA. That doesn't always follow. He's very peculiar. Remember, you weren't positive it was he the night your bunny-rabbit died, until he told you so. And even now, he came like a beggar.

GEVHER. So he did! It seems so long ago, I had almost forgotten!

FERDA. We mustn't forget! We must always remember! He said so.

GEVHER. That's it! We must look out for beggars. Then we shall be sure to recognize him.

FERDA. Well, we don't really know! He may come as a sultan next time. In fact, I'm almost certain he will! I *am* certain! After all, you know! He'd look fine with armies behind him, and a big crown on his head, and a sceptre in his hand, and wearing a gorgeous gown with dragons all over it!

GEVHER. Ferda! Ferda! Who's forgetting now?

FERDA. Forgetting! . . . . So I am! Isn't it odd how quickly real things go out of your head? What shall we do about it?

GEVHER. I don't know! It's dreadfully puzzling! . . . . Oh, I've thought of something fearful! Do you think we're growing old?

FERDA. I feel frightfully old! Millions!

GEVHER. And me! More!

FERDA. I must say, you don't look very old yet.

GEVHER. Nor you. But you never can tell! Oh! Something came! . . . .

FERDA. What is it?

GEVHER. How to know him! Don't you remember what he said? It isn't his disguises that count! Beggar or sultan, it doesn't really matter! It's what he is himself!

FERDA. So he did! Why, then, it's perfectly plain what we must look for! . . . .

BOTH. He's a baker!

FERDA. And I'm his *chela*, his disciple! I'm the baker's boy!

GEVHER. And I'm the baker's daughter!

BOTH. Bread for everybody! Bread for the world!

The jungle becomes a blaze of gold.

FERDA (*tragically*). Oh! Something came! . . . .

GEVHER. What is it?

FERDA. Something terrible! The end of everything! He's gone, he's gone! I'm his boy, his *chela;* and he never taught me how!

GEVHER. How what?

FERDA. To make bread!

GEVHER (*jubilantly*). Oh! Oh! I know a secret! I know a secret! I know a secret!

And she begins dancing all over the place.

FERDA. Gevher! Gevher! Stop bobbing; are you mad? Don't you understand my heart is broken?

GEVHER. Mine's not! It's alive with joy! It's jumping with it!

FERDA. Gevher! Dewdrop! Pearl! Are the pangs of boyhood of no more avail in the world? Can't you see the tragedy of it?

GEVHER. I can see nothing but joy—joy—joy forevermore! Don't say another word! I've a surprise for you! Now keep silent! . . . .

She frisks across the garden for her little basket.

What do you suppose this is?

FERDA. I can't imagine! Never! Do you mean . . . . ?

She uncovers it for him.

It isn't! It's not true! It can't be!

GEVHER. Yes, it can too! I made it!

FERDA. You! Impossible! You're only a girl!

GEVHER. That's why! You're only a boy! You can taste a bit now, if you'll say sorry for being piggy!

FERDA. Sorry!

GEVHER. I'm sorry for all the piggy I was too!

She gravely breaks off two pieces of the bread.

A piece for you! A piece for me! O my father!

FERDA. O my master!

GEVHER. Wherever you are, we will be faithful to you always!

FERDA. We will be your little maid and boy forever!

They eat. JALAL *appears shining in the jungle doorway. They do not see him there, but their hearts are full of him.*

Oh! . . . .

GEVHER. What is it? Oh!

BOTH. Something came!

GEVHER. Tell me yours!

FERDA. Tell me yours!

GEVHER. I know what innocency is!

FERDA. Mine's like that too! It's a sort of introduction! Why, I know myself!

GEVHER. It's my father! He's here! He's here all the time, though we cannot see him!

FERDA. He's here forever and ever without stopping! He's inside us! He's being born within us again and again every moment of the day! He's a boy! He's a baby! He's less than a baby! He's youth eternal! Come, Gevher! Give me your hand! Let's go and tell all the other boys and girls!

They skip down the steps and through the length of the valley, singing merrily:

BOTH. Bread! Bread! Bread for everybody! Bread for the whole world!

JALAL *still stands shining in the doorway. The curtain descends. It is the end of the play.*

THE TERRIBLE MEEK

A ONE-ACT STAGE PLAY WRITTEN IN SIGNIFICANT FORM FOR THREE VOICES; TO BE PLAYED IN DARKNESS

For they shall inherit the earth.—Matt. 5:5

THE TERRIBLE MEEK was written in Holy Week, 1911, and first produced under the management of Mr. Winthrop Ames at the Little Theatre, New York City, during Lent, 1912. On the day of the production it was also published by Harper and Brothers of New York. This was two years and a half before the World War.

At the same time, copies of the play were sent by the author to the various monarchs and presidents, the war lords, leading statesmen, and other prominent public men of all countries. Some of these copies were returned. The play was banned in London, Berlin, and St. Petersburg (now Petrograd); and its reception in New York City may best be realized by a reference to the papers of the period.

Since then, it has been performed, recited, broadcasted, in churches, colleges, theaters, thousands of times, all over the world. It is even done in Chinese.

The author has always considered *The Terrible Meek* a contribution toward the peace movement, and therefore takes no royalties upon the performances. He would appreciate, however, the courtesy of a notification from anyone using the play.

THE TERRIBLE MEEK

THE TERRIBLE MEEK is a One-Act Stage Play written in Significant Form, for Three Voices; to be played in Darkness.

THE TIME is a time of darkness.

THE PLACE is a wind-swept hill.

THE PERSONS heard are a Peasant Woman, an Army Captain, and a Soldier.

THE TERRIBLE MEEK

Before the curtain rises, a bell from some distant place of worship tolls the hour. Nine brazen notes, far off, out of tune. Then a heavy peal of thunder, and the sharp cracking strike of a bolt; yet, above all, one other sound, more piercing—a strange, unearthly cry. There follows a mighty howling of wind, blended with a confused clamor of voices and the hurrying of many feet. The noises have almost all died away, when the curtain rises upon inky darkness.

A sudden hush. The silence deepens. There is a sense of moorlands and desolate places.

Far off, a cow lows in her stall. Some lost sheep down in the valley bleats dismally. Silence again.

It is broken by the voice of a woman, weeping bitterly. It is the PEASANT WOMAN.

WOMAN. Oh! . . . .

Another voice: the gentlemanly, well-bred voice of an army man, now under some stress of emotion. It is the CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN. My God, this is awful. I can't stand it.

WOMAN. Oh! . . . .

CAPTAIN. Come, my good woman, it's all over now. There's no earthly help for it. You can't remain here, you know.

WOMAN. Leave me be. Leave me be.

CAPTAIN. All the others left long ago. They hurried off home the moment—the moment the storm came. . . . . Come, it's bleak and quite too dreadful for you up on this hill. Let me send you back to the town with one of the soldiers.

WOMAN. One of the—soldiers! . . . .

CAPTAIN. Yes: come, come now . . . .

WOMAN. Leave me be. Don't touch me. There's the smell of death on you.

CAPTAIN. Well, since you . . . . And, after all . . . .

The clank and rattle of his sword and uniform mark his moving away. He sits.

The smell of death. My God, it's true.

A bitter wind comes soughing up from the valley. The sheep bleats once, piteously. Then all is quiet again.

Someone else is coming. He is heard stumbling blindly up over the hill, the steel butt of his weapon ringing among the stones. It is the SOLDIER.

Groping in darkness, he collides suddenly with the CAPTAIN. *His voice is that of a common man, city-bred:*

SOLDIER. Gawd blimey, wot the 'ell . . . . Oh, beg pawdon, sir. Didn't know it was you, Captain.

CAPTAIN. That's all right, sentry.

SOLDIER. 'Pon my word, sir, you give me a start, fust go orf. Wot with the storm an' the darkness, an' this 'ere little job we been doin', I tek my oath I thought for a moment as you was . . . . well, summat else.

Wasn't quite a nice thing wot 'appened up 'ere just nah, sir, was it?

Captain. It wasn't.

Soldier. I'm on guard myself, sir; or I don't know as I'd 'a 'come up, not for choice.
You bin 'ere all the time, Captain?

Captain. Have I? Yes, I suppose I have. I've been here . . . . ever since.

Soldier. It's not exackly the place ter spend a pleasant arternoon, is it, sir?

Captain. No, I suppose not.

Soldier. O' course, there's company, as you might say; but not quite congenial company, eh wot?

Captain. That depends entirely upon the point of view.

Soldier. Dam' creepy, I call it! . . . . Well, we done for *'im* good an' proper, any'ah.

Captain. My God, yes. We builders of empire know how to do our business.

Soldier. Pretty bloody business, too, ain't it, sir?

Captain. Yes, that's the word.

They consider it for a moment. Presently the Soldier *laughs at some amusing recollection.*

Soldier. Well, it's an ill wind wot blows nobody any good. *I* got summat aht o' this, orl said an' done.

Captain. What's that?

Soldier. I got some of 'is togs.

Captain. His togs. How do you mean?

SOLDIER. Why, I'll tell yer. '*E* didn't want no more togs, not the way 'e was goin'; nah did 'e? So me an' the boys, we got our 'eds together, and arter we'd undressed 'im an' put 'im to bed, so to speak, we pitched an' tossed for the 'ole bag lot, one by one, till they was orl bloomin' well divided aht. I got 'is boots.

CAPTAIN. You got his boots, did you?

SOLDIER. Yes, pore devil. '*E* don't want them no more. Not quite my fit; but they'll do to tek 'ome for a keepsake—that is, if we ever do get 'ome aht of this 'ere stinkin' 'ole. My little missis 'll think a lot of them boots.

CAPTAIN. They will be a pleasant memento.

SOLDIER. Just wot *I* say, sir. Oh, my missis, she got an 'oly nose for 'orrors: she reely 'ave. Tellin' abaht them boots 'll last 'er a lifetime.

CAPTAIN. She must be an attractive young woman, your —missis.

SOLDIER. Oh no, sir, just ordinary, just ordinary. Suits *me*, orl right. . . . .

Some memory holds him for a moment;

Funny thing, Captain, 'ow this 'ere foreign service keeps you—well, sort of thinkin', don't it? S'pose it's the lonely nights an' the long sentry duties an' such like . . . .

CAPTAIN. You've felt that too, then, have you?

SOLDIER. Yessir; meks me think abaht my missis. 'Er was in the family way when I left 'ome, sir—expectin' just a couple of month arter I sailed . . . . The little beggar 'll be gettin' on by nah—that is, if 'e come orl right.

CAPTAIN. You've made up your mind for a boy then, eh?

SOLDIER. She allus 'oped for a boy, sir. Women's like that. S'pose it's orl right; it's men wot's wanted these days, wot with the Army an' the Spread of Empire an' orl that.

CAPTAIN. Yes, they make better killing.

The SOLDIER *is rather stupid, or he would have laughed. He goes on:*

SOLDIER. Yessir, 'er's bin 'ankerin' arter a kid ever since we was married six year ago; but some-'ow or other it never seemed to come orf. 'Ealthy woman, too, sir. *You* unnerstand 'ow these things is, Captain: there's no tellin'. Little beggars come by guess an' by Gawd, it seems to me .... I wonder if it's a boy. There's no gettin' no news aht in this blarsted .... Good Gawd, wot's that? ....

CAPTAIN. What?

SOLDIER. Be'ind us. Summat sort of .... There, 'ark!

The WOMAN'S *voice rises, sighing like wind:*

WOMAN. Oh! ....

SOLDIER. My Gawd, wot is it?

CAPTAIN. It's a woman.

SOLDIER. A woman! Up *'ere?*

CAPTAIN. She has every right to be here. This is her place.

SOLDIER. But does she know? Does she know wot's .... danglin' up yonder, over 'er 'ead?

CAPTAIN. She knows more than we do. She belongs to him. She is his mother.

SOLDIER. 'Is mother! . . . .

CAPTAIN. Yes, he was her baby once.

The SOLDIER *is affected by this. He speaks with real compassion:*

SOLDIER. Pore devil!

Their minds go wandering through many troubled by-paths of thought. Presently the SOLDIER *speaks again:*

Wot was it 'e done, Captain?

CAPTAIN. Don't you know?

SOLDIER. Not exackly. I got enough to look arter with my drills an' vittles withaht messin' abaht with politics an' these 'ere funny foreign religions.

CAPTAIN. And yet you, if I mistake not, were one of the four men told off to do the job.

SOLDIER. Well, I 'ope I know my duty, sir. I on'y obeyed orders. Come to that, sir, arskin' your pawdon, it was you as give them orders. I s'pose *you* knew orl right wot it was 'e done?

CAPTAIN. No, I don't know exactly, either. I am only just beginning to find out. We both did our duty, as you call it, in blindness.

SOLDIER. That's strange langwidge to be comin' from *your* lips, Captain.

CAPTAIN. Strange thoughts have been coming to me during the last six hours.

SOLDIER. It's difficult to know wot's wot in these outlandish places. It's not like at 'ome, sir, where there's Law an' Order an' Patriotism an' Gawd's Own True Religion. These blarsted 'eathens got no gratitude. 'Ere's the Empire sweatin' 'er guts aht, tryin' ter knock some sense inter their dam' silly 'eads; an' wot do you get aht of it, orl said an' done? Nuthin'! Nuthin' but a lot of ingratitude, 'ard words, insurrections, an' every nah an' then a bloody example like this 'ere to-day! Oh, these foreigners mek me sick, they do reely!

CAPTAIN. Yes, perhaps that has been the real mistake all along.

SOLDIER. Wot 'as, Captain?

CAPTAIN. Taking these people—men like this one, for instance—for foreigners.

SOLDIER. Well, you'll excuse me, sir, but wot the 'ell else are they?

CAPTAIN. I'm not quite sure; but supposing they were more nearly related? Supposing, after all, they happened to be made of the same flesh and blood as you and me? Supposing they were men? Supposing, even, they were—brothers?

SOLDIER. Brothers! Why, that's exackly wot 'e used ter say—'im up there . . . . Did you ever 'ear 'im, sir?

CAPTAIN. Once. Did you?

SOLDIER. Once.

They remain silent for a little.

It was politics when I 'eard 'im. On'y it sahnded more like some rummy religion.

CAPTAIN. When I heard him it was religion—sounding curiously like politics.

Soldier. Them two things don't 'ardly seem to go together, do they, sir?

Captain. They don't. Perhaps they ought to.

Soldier. I don't know. Seems to 'ave led *'im* into a pretty mess . . . . It's a queer world! . . . . I wonder wot it was 'e reely done.

Captain. It's rather late in the day for us to be considering that, seeing what *we* have done, isn't it?

Soldier. Well, I don't know. P'r'aps it's funny of me, but I never done a job like this yet withaht thinkin' abaht it arterwards . . . . An' I done a few of 'em, too.

If you arsk me, sir, it was them—well, them longfaced old jossers dahn there as begun the 'ole beastly business. You know 'oo I mean.

Captain. Yes, I know whom you mean. But haven't they a name?

Soldier. Well, I 'ardly know *wot* ter call them, sir. They're like a lot of old washerwomen. Allus jawin'. We got nuthin' exackly like that sort at 'ome, sir.

Captain. Oh, I don't know that there's all that difference.

Soldier. They was allus naggin' the pore fellow, one way an' another. Couldn't leave 'im alone. They started the 'ole business.

Captain. Why, what fault did they find with him? What was it they said he did?

Soldier. It wasn't nuthin' 'e done, far as I could mek aht. It was summat as 'e said, wot riled them.

Captain. Something he said?

Soldier. Yes, summat 'orrible; that's wot they said. Summat too bad ter be spoken, summat they wasn't a-goin' ter stand from anybody. Least, that's wot I 'eard . . . . Wasn't so very 'orrible, neither. Not ter me. Sahnded a bit mad, that's orl.

Captain. Oh, then you know what it was?

Soldier. Yessir. They 'ad a name for it, too: on'y I can't quite remember. One of them big jawcrackers, you unnerstand. Seems a bit orf for a bloke ter come ter this, just for usin' a few words.

Captain. There is great power in words. All the things that ever get done in the world, good or bad, are done by words.

Soldier. Well, there's summat in that, too. On'y this thing 'e said—blimey, it was nuthin'! There ain't a loony alive wot doesn't say the same thing 'e said, an' more, a thahsand times a day, when 'e's reel bad in 'is 'ead. At the most, it sahnded like a bit of langwidge, that's orl.

Captain. And *you* don't mind that, do you?

Soldier. Me? 'E could' a'done it till 'e was blue in the face an' welcome, far as I'd care.

Captain. You yourself, of course, had nothing at all against him? Nothing personal, nothing political, I mean. No more than I had.

Soldier. Lor' bless you, no, sir. Rawther liked 'im, the bit I saw of 'im.

Captain. Only they—the long-faced gentlemen—found him guilty. So, of course, they had to hand him over to the magistrate.

SOLDIER. Yes, blarst them. What did they want ter go an' do that for?

CAPTAIN. It was perhaps their—duty, don't you see?

SOLDIER (*taken aback on the sacred word*). Oh, was it? Well, since you put it in that way, o' course . . . .

CAPTAIN. Then, again, came the magistrate's duty. I suppose he found he had some duty in the matter? Did *he* very much object to this horrible thing that had been said?

SOLDIER. Not much! 'E ain't that sort, not this fellow! . . . . That's the funny thing abaht it. Far as I could 'ear, there weren't no mention of that, by the time the case come into 'is 'ands. No, it was riotin' an' stirrin' people up agen the government, as 'e on'y 'ad ter deal with.

CAPTAIN. Was that charge proved against the prisoner?

SOLDIER. They 'ad witnesses, I suppose. On'y you know wot witnesses are, in a case like this, sir. Got their orders, you unnerstand.

CAPTAIN. And, of course, they all did their duty. That sacred obligation was attended to. They obeyed.

SOLDIER. I don't know. Don't arsk me. I know nuthin' abaht it.

He is a little nettled at the turn the conversation is taking.

CAPTAIN. Was there no one, from among all those crowds that followed him, to stand up and say a word for him?

SOLDIER. Well, wot do *you* think? Them greasy blighters! You saw 'ow they be'aved just nah, when we done the job.

CAPTAIN. *Their* duty, as voicers of public opinion, I suppose.

SOLDIER (*sullenly*). I don't know.

CAPTAIN. Had they any very strong feelings against this monstrous thing he said? Were they so stirred with affection for the government? Or didn't their duty cover those unessential points?

SOLDIER. I don't know.

CAPTAIN. Well then, this magistrate? Having examined this poor wretch in the presence of all that exemplary, patriotic, obedient mob of people, he soon found out where *his* duty lay? It was his duty to hand him over to us—to you and me.

SOLDIER (*shortly*). Yessir.

CAPTAIN (*insisting*). To you and me.

SOLDIER. I said, Yessir.

CAPTAIN. Whereupon, though we were practically ignorant as to the charge upon which this man was convicted: though we had grave doubts as to whether he were guilty at all; and while it is perfectly certain that we had nothing against him personally, that we even liked him, sympathized with him, pitied him: it became *our* duty, our sworn, our sacred duty, to do to him—the terrible thing we did just now.

SOLDIER. I can't see wot you're drivin' at, sir. You wouldn't 'ave a man go agen 'is duty, would you?

CAPTAIN. I'm trying to make up my mind. I don't know. I'm blind. I don't think I know what duty is.

SOLDIER. It's perfectly plain, sir. Arter all, duty *is* duty, ain't it?

CAPTAIN. Yes, it doesn't seem to be very much else.

SOLDIER. 'Ow do you mean, sir?

CAPTAIN. Well, for instance, it doesn't seem to be love or neighborliness or pity or understanding or anything that comes out hot and fierce from the heart of a man. Duty! Duty! We talk of duty! What sort of devil's duties are there in the world, do you think, when they lead blindly, wantonly, wickedly, to the murder of such a man as this!

SOLDIER. Well, far as I'm concerned, I on'y obeyed my orders.

CAPTAIN. Orders! Obeyed orders!

SOLDIER. Well, sir, it was you as give them to me.

CAPTAIN. Good God, man, why didn't you strike me in the blasphemous teeth, the hour I gave them?

SOLDIER. Me, sir? Strike my superior orficer!

CAPTAIN. You struck this defenceless man. You had no scruples about his superiority. You struck him to the death.

SOLDIER (*hotly*). I on'y did my duty!

CAPTAIN. We have murdered our brother. We have destroyed a woman's child.

SOLDIER. I on'y obeyed my orders. When my superior orficer says, *Kill a man*, why, I just kill 'im, that's orl. O' course I kill 'im. Wot's a soldier for? That's duty! (*With sudden lust.*) Blood an' 'ell! I'd kill 'im soon as look at 'im, yes, I would, if 'e was Gawd aht of 'Eaven, 'Im-self! . . . . Not as I 'ave anythin' personal agen this pore devil. On'y I *do* know my duty.

They are silent a little. Then the SOLDIER, *feeling that he has perhaps gone too far, says:*

There's one thing certain: it's no use cryin' over spilt milk. 'E's dead an' done for nah, wotever comes. Dead as a door-nail, pore cuss.

The CAPTAIN, *who has risen during his excitement, now sits down again. His sword clatters against a boulder.*

A pause.

'E ain't the fust man I done for, neither; an' I bet 'e won't be the last. Not by a long way.

He speaks in an aggrieved tone. It is the way shame comes to him.

A pause.

CAPTAIN (*deeply*). So you think he is dead, do you?

SOLDIER. Well, wot do *you* think? A man don't live forever, 'ung up as 'igh as we got 'im yonder. Besides, we did a bit of business with 'is vital parts, arter we'd got 'im up there.

CAPTAIN. And all that, you think, means—death.

SOLDIER. Well, don't it?

CAPTAIN. That's what I'm wondering.

SOLDIER. Six hours, mind you. It's a long time.

CAPTAIN. There is something mightier than time.

SOLDIER. Well, they don't supply little boys' playthings, not from our War Office. One of these 'ere beauties . . . .

He rattles his weapon in the darkness and continues:

. . . . when they *do* start business, generally touch the spot.

CAPTAIN. It would have to reach very far, to touch—this man's life.

SOLDIER. Nah, wotever do you mean, Captain?

CAPTAIN. I mean that life is a terrible, a wonderful thing. You can't kill it. All the soldiers in the world, with all their hate, can't kill it. It comes back, it can't die, it rises again.

SOLDIER. Good Gawd, Captain, don't you talk like that!

CAPTAIN. Why, what are you afraid of? We have shown great courage to-day, you and I. Soldiers should be brave, you know.

SOLDIER. That's orl very well, when it's a matter of plain flesh an' blood; but Lor'! Ghosts! . . . . Do you believe in them, sir?

CAPTAIN. What?

SOLDIER. Ghosts.

CAPTAIN. Yes. It came to me to-day.

SOLDIER (*slowly*). If I believed there was reely ghosts abaht . . . .

CAPTAIN. They are the only realities. Two of them ought to be especially important to you and me just now.

SOLDIER. Two? Blimey! 'Oose?

CAPTAIN. Why, yours, man, and mine. Our ghosts. Our immortal ghosts. This deed of ours to-day should make us think of them forever.

SOLDIER. Yours an' mine? I didn't know we 'ad ghosts, you an' me.

CAPTAIN. It makes a difference, doesn't it? There have been millions of our sort in the long history of the world. I wonder how many more millions there will be in the years to come. Blind, dutiful, bloody-handed: murderers, all of us. A soldier's ghost must be a pitiable thing to see.

The cloudy darkness slightly lifts from the ground. Their forms can be dimly discerned—vague shadows upon a deeper gloom. Up above there still dwells impenetrable night.

Tell me, brother murderer, have you ever prayed?

SOLDIER. Me, sir? . . . . (*Ashamed.*) Well, sir, nah you arsk me, yes I 'ave—once.

CAPTAIN. When was that?

SOLDIER. Why, sir, abaht a couple of month arter I set sail for this blarsted little 'ole.

CAPTAIN. I understand. You prayed then for the birth of an innocent child?

SOLDIER. Yessir.

CAPTAIN. You will have need to pray again tonight. Both of us will have need. This time for the death of an innocent man.

The SOLDIER *is embarrassed. He does not know what to say. Something about "duty" floats through his mind; but he has said that. Perhaps he had better go.*

Soldier. Well, it's time I was dahn yonder, lookin' arter the boys. Any orders, sir?

Captain. Orders? No, no more—orders.

Soldier. Orl right, sir.

There is heard the rattle of his salute, and the dying away of his footsteps, as he stumbles blindly up and over the hill.

The Captain *does not speak until all is still again.*

Captain. My God! My God! O my God!

He buries his face in the dirt and stones.

The faintest moaning of wind. The sheep bleats. A dog, disturbed by the sound, barks, far off. Then there is a deep silence, lasting one minute. The voice of the Peasant Woman *is heard, speaking at first in dull, dead tones, very slowly:*

Woman. Thirty-three year ago he was my baby. I bore him. I warmed him: washed, dressed him: fended for him. I fed his little mouth with milk. Thirty-three year ago. And now he's dead.

Dead, that's what he is. Dead. Hung up in the air like a thief: broken and bleeding like a slaughtered beast. All the life gone out of him. And I'm his mother.

A gray, misty light creeps over her face and hands. Moment by moment, her features limn out faintly through the darkness, one pale agony. Her garments still blend with the general gloom.

That's what they done to my son. Killed him like a beast. Respectable people, they was. Priests, judges, soldiers, gentlemen: even common folk like me. *They* done it. And now he's dead.

He didn't hold with their kind, my son. He was always telling them about it. He would stand up open in the market-place, at the street corners, even in the House of God itself, and tell them about it. That's why they killed him.

He had a strange way with him, my son: always had, from the day he first come. His eyes . . . . they was wonderful. They held folk. That and his tongue and his tender, pitiful heart.

They didn't understand it down here. None of us understood it. We was blind—even me. Many a time I got in his way and tried to hinder him: I was afraid for him, ashamed. And then he'd look at me . . . . They was always wonderful, his eyes.

He wasn't particular, my son. He would go with anybody. He loved them so. There wasn't a drunken bibber in the place, not a lozel, not a thief, not a loose woman on the streets, but called him brother. He would eat with them, drink with them, go to their parties. He would go with grand folk, too: gentlemen. He wasn't particular: he would go with anybody.

And I tried to hinder him: I got in his way, because I was ashamed. I kept pushing in. I was afraid of what the people might think. Like I was blind. Like I didn't understand. I never told him as I understood. And now it's too late. He's dead.

A gust of anguish takes her, overwhelming her:

O my son, my own son, child of my sorrow, my lad, come back to me! It's me, it's your mother, calling to you. Cannot you hear me out of the lone waste and the darkness yonder? My lad, come back, come back to me! . . . .

He's gone. I shall never know the touch and the healing gladness of him again, my son, my little lad . . . . Hark! . . . .

The wind rises and falls away like a whisper.

On'y the wind blowing up over the moors. God's breath, men call it. Ah! It strikes chill to the bones . . . .

Is it cold you are, my lad? I cannot reach you yonder—on'y your feet, your poor broken feet and the ankles hanging limp toward me. My bosom warms and waits for you, hungering, yearning like the day I bare you; but I cannot get up to you: I am cramped and cold and beaten: I cannot reach you yonder . . . .

There is heard a low fluttering as of wings.

The night-birds and the bats may come anigh you, they with their black wings; but not your mother, the mother that gave you life, the mother that held you warm, my son, my son, my little cold lad.

Her speech breaks away into sobs for a little while. As she recovers, she goes into a dazed dream of memories:

That was a cold night, too—the night you was born, way out in the country yonder, in the barn with them beasties. My man, he was sore about it. He covered us over with his great wool coat, and went and sat out in the yard—under the stars—till them three gentlemen come.

Them three gentlemen . . . . They talked wonderful. I have it all here in my heart.

Ay, it was rare and cold that night. Like now. Like it is now . . . .

Wonderful. They was not common folk. They was like lords, they spoke so fine. About my little lad. About you.

And then, that other night, before you come. It was a kind of light: it was a kind of glory. Like sunshine. I remember every word he said. About you. About my little lad.

The agony begins to prick through again, stab by stab, as she continues:

It was all promise in them days, all promise and hope. Like you was to be somebody. Like you was to be a great man. I kept it inside of me: I fed on it: day by day as you sprung up, I learned you about it. You was to be no common man, you wasn't. You was to lord it over everybody. You was to be a master of men, you was. And now you'm dead. Oh! . . . . Oh! . . . . Oh, me! . . . . That day of the fairing, when we went up to the big city, your father and me and yourself. The wide asking eyes of you, your little hand, how it would go out so and so, your little tongue all a-clatter, the ways, the wonderings of you, and the heartbreak, the heartbreak when we had you lost. Talking to the good priests, you said. Good priests! My God! . . . .

It began that day, that bitter day of the fairing when we went up to the big city. I lost you then. I have lost you ever since.

Oh, the big city, the cruel city, the city of men's sin! Calling, calling the sweet life of a man and swallowing him up in death. There was no doing with you from that day. No home for you in the little village from that day. Your father's trade, your tasks, your companions, all fell off from you that day. The city, the big city called you, and the country thereabouts. It was your kingdom, you said. You must find out and build your kingdom. And the people thronged about you and followed you wherever you went in them days. They hung upon your words: they worshipped you. In them days. It was the way you had—your strange way. A power went out from you. You was always like nobody else. A king! A king! It was me as put it first into your head. You looked like a king. You spoke like a king. You ruled like a king. You, the little peasant lad I bore. I never told you: I never lifted up my hands to help you: I hindered you; but I was proud of you, my lad, proud and ashamed, and afraid, too! And now it's too late. You'm dead. All come to nothing. You'm dead . . . .

Dead. Killed by the soldiers and the judges of the great city. I'll tell them about it. I'll go through all the earth telling about it. Killed by the men you called your brothers. Killed by the children of your kingdom. Killed, and the golden crown of your glory torn off, battered, and cast to the ground. Beaten, mocked, murdered by the mighty masters of the world. Hung up, high up in the air like a thief. Broken and bleeding like a slaughtered beast.

She has come to the bottom of her grief. Her voice dies away through strangled sobs into silence.

A pause.

The CAPTAIN *rises. He halts irresolute for a moment. Then he can be heard moving over to where she lies prone on the ground.*

CAPTAIN. Woman, will you let me speak to you?

WOMAN. Who are you?

CAPTAIN. I am the captain who spoke to you just now. I am in charge here. I am the man who gave the order that killed your son.

WOMAN. Oh! . . . .

CAPTAIN. Won't you hear me? I must speak to you.

WOMAN. What do you want to say? What is there for you to say?

CAPTAIN. It is about myself . . . . I . . . .

WOMAN. Go on. I'm listening.

CAPTAIN. I am a murderer. I want you to forgive me.

She does not answer.

I did it. I did it with a word. It was like magic. One word, one little word, and I was a murderer. There is nothing more terrible in the world than to be a murderer . . . . And now I want you to forgive me.

She does not answer.

I suppose it's impossible. Forgiveness is impossible for a wretch like me. Because I killed him.
For God's sake, speak to me!

WOMAN (*in a stupor*). I want to. I'm trying to. But you say you killed my son.

CAPTAIN. Oh! . . . .

WOMAN. Why did you do it?

CAPTAIN. I did not know. Killing's my trade. It was the only thing they brought me up to do.

She does not answer.

I have been mixed up with it ever since I can remember. My father did it before me. All my people did it. It is considered the thing—the sort of thing a gentleman ought to do. They call it glory: they call it honor; courage; patriotism. Great kings hold their thrones by it. Great merchants get their beastly riches by it. Great empires are built that way.

WOMAN. By murder?

CAPTAIN. By murder. By the blood of just men. Women and little children too.

WOMAN. What makes them do it?

CAPTAIN. They want money. They want power. They want kingdom. They want to possess the earth.

WOMAN. And they have won. They have it.

CAPTAIN. Have they? Not while your son hangs there.

She is bewildered.

WOMAN. What do you mean? My son . . . . My son is dead.

CAPTAIN. Is he? Not while God is in heaven.

WOMAN. I don't understand you. What were you saying yourself, just now? On'y a little while ago I heard his blood dripping down here in the darkness. The stones are dank with it. Not an hour ago. He's dead.

CAPTAIN. He's alive.

WOMAN. Why do you mock me? You'm mad. Are you God, as you can kill and make alive, all in one breath?

CAPTAIN. He's alive. I can't kill him. All the empires can't kill him. How shall hate destroy the power that possesses and rules the earth?

WOMAN. The power that . . . . Who?

CAPTAIN. This broken thing up here. Your son.

WOMAN. My son, the power that . . . .

CAPTAIN. Listen. I will tell you . . . . I am a soldier. I have been helping to build kingdoms for over twenty years. I have never known any other trade. Soldiery, bloodshed, murder: that's my business. My hands are crimson with it. That's what empire means.

In the city I come from, it is the chief concern of the people. Building kingdoms, rule, empire. They're proud of it. The little children in the schools are drilled in obedience to it: they are taught hymns in praise of it: they are brought up to reverence its symbols. When they wave its standard above them, they shout, they leap, they make wild and joyful noises; like animals, like wolves, like little brute beasts. Children! Young children! Their parents encourage them in it: it never occurs to them to feel ashamed: they would be treated like lepers if they felt ashamed. That's what empire does to human beings in the city I come from. It springs from fear—a peculiar kind of fear they call courage.

And so we go on building our kingdoms—the kingdoms of this world. We stretch out our hands, greedy, grasping, tyrannical, to possess the earth. Domination, power, glory, money, merchandise, luxury, these are the things we aim at; but what we really gain is pest and famine, grudge labor, the enslaved hate of men and women, ghosts, dead and death-breathing ghosts that haunt our lives forever. It can't last: it never has lasted, this building in blood and fear. Already our kingdoms begin to totter. Possess the earth! We have lost it. We never did possess it. We have lost both earth and ourselves in trying to possess it; for the soul of the earth is man and the love of him, and we have made of both, a desolation.

I tell you, woman, this dead son of yours, disfigured, shamed, spat upon, has built a kingdom this day that can never die. The living glory of him rules it. The earth is *his* and he made it. He and his brothers have been molding and making it through the long ages: they are the only ones who ever really did possess it: not the proud: not the idle, not the wealthy, not the vaunting empires of the world. Something has happened up here on this hill to-day to shake all our kingdoms of blood and fear to the dust. The earth is his, the earth is theirs, and they made it. The meek, the terrible meek, the fierce agonizing meek, are about to enter into their inheritance.

There is a deep, solemn silence for a moment or two, broken only by the tinkle of sheep-bells, which are gradually approaching.

WOMAN. Then it was not all wasted. It was the truth, that night. I have born a man.

CAPTAIN. A man and more than a man. A king.

WOMAN. My peasant lad, a king: yes. And more yet. He was what he said he was. He was God's Son.

CAPTAIN. It will take a new kind of soldier to serve in his kingdom. A new kind of duty.

WOMAN. A newer courage. More like woman's. Dealing with life, not death.

CAPTAIN. It changes everything.

WOMAN. It puts them back again. What he done, puts all things back again, where they belong.

CAPTAIN. I can see the end of war in this: some day.

WOMAN. I can see the joy of women and little children: some day.

CAPTAIN. I can see cities and great spaces of land full of happiness.

WOMAN. I can see love shining in every face.

CAPTAIN. There shall be no more sin, no pain . . . .

WOMAN. No loss, no death . . . .

CAPTAIN. Only life, only God . . . .

WOMAN. And the kingdom of my Son . . . .

CAPTAIN. Some day.

WOMAN. When the world shall have learned.

CAPTAIN. Mother! . . . . I am a murderer! . . . .

WOMAN. I have been with child. I forgive you.

It grows a little lighter.

Someone is heard stumbling blindly over the hill. It is the SOLDIER. *His form emerges gray out of the gloom.*

SOLDIER. 'Ello! Are you there, Captain?

CAPTAIN. Yes. I'm here.

SOLDIER. The fog's liftin' dahn below there—liftin' fast. It'll soon be up orf this 'ill, thank Gawd! The General wants ter see you, sir.

CAPTAIN. What does he want with me? Do you know?

SOLDIER. Another of these 'ere bleedin' jobs, I think, sir. Been a bit of a disturbance dahn in the tahn. The boys 'ave their orders, sir. General wants you ter take command.

CAPTAIN. Tell him I refuse to come.

SOLDIER. Beg pawdon, sir . . . .

CAPTAIN. I refuse to come. I disobey.

SOLDIER. I don't think I quite 'eard, sir.

CAPTAIN. I disobey. I have sworn duty to another General. I serve the Empire no longer.

SOLDIER. Beg pawdon, sir, it's not for the likes of me; but . . . . Well, you know wot that means.

CAPTAIN. Perfectly. It means what you call death. Tell the General.

SOLDIER. Tell 'im as you refuse to obey orders, sir?

CAPTAIN. His: yes. (*Half to himself.*) How simple it all is, after all.

SOLDIER (*after a moment*). I'm sorry, Captain.

CAPTAIN. Thank you, brother.

The SOLDIER *has no word to say.*

The darkness is rapidly melting away. All three figures are now beginning to be seen quite clearly.

SOLDIER. Look sir, wot did I tell yer? It's comin' light again.

CAPTAIN. Eternally.

An unearthly splendor fills the place. It is seen to be the top of a bleak stony hill with little grass to it.

The WOMAN *is dressed in Eastern garments; the* CAPTAIN *is a Roman centurion; the* SOLDIER, *a Roman legionary. Above them rise three gaunt crosses bearing three dead men gibbeted like thieves.*

At the foot of the crosses a flock of sheep nibble peacefully at the grass. The air is filled with the sound of their little bells.

The curtain falls. It is the end of the play.

THE NECESSARY EVIL

A ONE-ACT STAGE PLAY WRITTEN IN SIGNIFICANT FORM FOR FOUR PLAYERS; TO BE PLAYED IN THE LIGHT

God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.—*Eccles. 7:29*

THE NECESSARY EVIL, written during the autumn of 1911, was first produced by Edith Wynne Matthison at the Fine Arts Theatre, Chicago, May, 1913.

It was first published by Harper and Brothers, New York, in February, 1913.

THE NECESSARY EVIL

The Necessary Evil is a One-Act Stage Play, written in Significant Form, for Four Players; to be played in the Light.

The Time is Today.

The Place is the Living-Room at John Heron's, a simple interior with a fireplace on one side, a window on the other, and a door leading into the hallway at the back. But almost the first thing to catch the eye is the portrait of a woman. It is not merely the size of the picture, not even the quality of the painting that commands attention; but something in the woman herself. Perhaps it is wistfulness, pathos; perhaps a deep, calm understanding; perhaps beauty. She dominates the room like a presence, a spirit, the mother of everything it holds.

A Piano and a small settee are by the window; a writing-desk above the fireplace; and in the middle of the room is a tea-table set for four, with a birthday cake and candles.

The Persons represented are John Heron, a musician; Nellie, his daughter; Frank, his son; and a Woman.

On the rise of the curtain, NELLIE *and* JOHN HERON *are discovered, the girl standing looking out of the open window, and her father busy, quill in hand, over some musical manuscript at the writing-table. He is a man of about forty-five, well preserved, hale, hearty, kindly, gray at the temples, and rather timidly gentle in his general movements and ways of speech: something of a wild bull, though, when roused. The girl might be almost any age from seventeen up to twenty-five; but is actually twenty-one, this being indeed her birthday, as witness the cake and candles on the tea-table. As she stands there at the window, the last flush of the setting sun about her face and hair, she is very beautiful: childlike, slim, fragile, she looks like a little pale lily, all exquisiteness and pathos.*

JOHN HERON, *absorbed in his manuscript, which he carries with him, goes to the fireplace and bending down lights his pipe with a paper spill.*

NELLIE. Oh, it is all so beautiful, so very beautiful. Why did He make everything so beautiful? And good!

HERON. Yes, I think that abrupt modulation to the dominant is rather . . . . Hm! Coming in just there, too.

NELLIE. Why, whatever are you talking about, Daddy? I'm not thinking about your dear old music. I'm thinking about something else. Something quite as beautiful though. Well . . . . almost.

JOHN HERON *pauses in the lighting of his pipe, and turns with a whimsical expression on his face.*

HERON. Why, whatever can that be, Sweetheart?

NELLIE. I'm thinking how beautiful it is to be alive. To be a part of it all. To be a part of all this, out here. Oh, how good everything is!

He crosses over to her, dropping the manuscript on the piano as he passes. He caresses her tenderly.

HERON. My child! My precious child!

NELLIE. Daddy, dear!

She unlinks herself. Caresses make her shy.

They stand for a moment or two together, looking thoughtfully out of the window. They are illumined by the sunlight.

Only to think of it! Scarcely a moment ago—why, it only seems like yesterday—and here I was, an invalid, a puny broken little wretch all skin and bones: nothing but a bag of misery with milk and eggs and codliver oil inside it. And then, your poor patient old face!—the care, the sorrow, the perpetual fear lest at any moment . . . . Oh, I know what went on in your heart, Daddy dear; though I never let on. And now, to think of it! I'm strong, I'm well again. I'm downstairs! I'm grown up. I'm not even the same person. Something magical has happened this very day. I'm a woman.

HERON. That's a big difference to come about all in one day.

NELLIE (*mysteriously*). Oh, there's a lot of magic can come about all in one day, I can tell you. Only you have to keep your eyes wide open, if you want to see it.

HERON. You! Why, you're only a baby. Not a particle of difference in you that I can see, since the day I wrote my first published song—you know, the cradle song. My *only* published song, to be precise.

NELLIE. Well you know, I'm getting rather a big baby, Father. Oh, I'm in earnest. Things have been happening to me— Yes they have: they have been happening a long time, only you didn't know of it.

HERON. There's nothing you can tell me about yourself, Miss, that I don't know. Oh, I can read you: I can read you like a book.

NELLIE. Daddy, you humbug! You don't even know what's happened to me today.

HERON. Don't I, indeed! I'd like to know the thing that's happened to you today, that I don't . . . . (*With quick alarm.*) You're in love with somebody.

NELLIE (*teasing*). Yes: I'm in love with my dear old Daddy.

HERON. If it's that doctor fellow, I'll wring his impertinent . . . .

NELLIE. Nonsense! As if anyone could fall in love with a bottle of codliver oil.

HERON. Then it's that damned little whippersnap of a lawyer. The young. . . . ! So *that's* why he wanted to take music lessons!

NELLIE. Wrong again. It's not that, either. And Alfred isn't a whippersnap. He's a very nice boy; and I'm going to marry him some day—when he proposes to me.

HERON. Oh, you're perfectly disgraceful! Shameless, I call it! Flirt with every single man you . . . . (*Lamely.*) What *has* happened to you today?

NELLIE. I thought you knew.

HERON (*brazenly*). Well, so I do; but I won't say.

NELLIE. Very well then. I needn't tell you.

HERON (*coaxing*). My child! . . . .

But he is not to be let off so easily.

NELLIE. Well, say I've won.

HERON. No, I'm damned if I will.

NELLIE. Naughty, naughty! But I really have won, you know.

HERON (*sulky*). Well, I won't say it.

NELLIE. You will, if you want to know. And you do. You're curious. You can't get out of that.

HERON. I won't say it.

NELLIE. Won't say what?

HERON (*not to be caught*). What you want me to say.

NELLIE (*trying other tactics*). Oh do!

HERON. I won't.

NELLIE. Yes.

HERON. No.

NELLIE. You don't love me.

HERON. Who says I don't?

NELLIE. Daddy, darling!

HERON. Very well then. All right.

NELLIE. All right what? Say it.

His manhood oozes out of him. He grunts weakly:

Heron. You've won.

Nellie. You good obedient angel! Now then, listen! Today, beginning early this morning—before the milkman—before the postman—before you ever thought of getting up—there happened . . . . Oh, but first of all, apologize for what you said about Alfred.

Heron. No, I'll be . . . .

But he really cannot go back over the same ground again: so:

Very well, I apologize for what I said about—Alfred.

There is a suspicious emphasis on the name.

Nellie. "Dear Alfred," Father darling.

Heron (*disgusted*). Oh, *dear* Alfred! Now for goodness sake, quicken up your tempo, and tell me your secret.

Nellie (*coming in prompt on the beat*). I will! . . . . Look over there.

Heron. Where?

Nellie. There. On the tea-table. It's been there for one whole mortal hour; and you've never noticed it.

Heron. Well, what is there to look at? I can only see a cake and a lot of ridiculous candles. What about it?

Nellie. Yes, this comes of choosing a geni-*ous* for a father. One whole hour, and you've never even looked at it. There's music for you! You know, *you* don't deserve to have a daughter's birthday.

Heron (*at sea*). Birthday . . . .

NELLIE. I tell you, you begin to feel that sort of neglect when you're twenty-one.

HERON. When you're what?

NELLIE. Twenty-one.

HERON. *Who's* twenty-one?

NELLIE. I am. I've been it all day long. That's the cake.

He stands dumbfounded, looking at it as if it were a miracle.

HERON. Well, I never! Cake . . . . Twenty-one . . . . *You!*

NELLIE. Twenty-one!

HERON. Oh, my precious, how selfish of me. And I never knew: never even dreamed of getting you a . . . . Here, stop a moment though . . . .

He begins fumbling importantly at his pocket-book.

NELLIE. No, no, Daddy: I don't want it, really I don't; and you can't afford it.

HERON. Nonsense, nonsense. This is an extra. Why, the royalties on my first published . . . . Look! I am quite rich. After all, royalties *are* royalties, aren't they? What do you think of that now? Five—whole . . . .

NELLIE. It's no use your talking, because we discussed every word of this when the cheque arrived this morning. Besides there is only just enough for the two volumes of Brahms; and we simply *must* have that Peters' edition, you know that.

HERON (*quizzically*). *We?* . . . .

NELLIE (*valiantly*). Yes, we. You's we, isn't it?

HERON (*tenderly*). Oh, my child! . . . . Look here, I'll tell you what I'll do. *One* volume of Brahms—the one with the intermezzos—and the rest of it for you. And we'll cry quits.

NELLIE. No! No! I want the sonatas.

HERON. Well, well, the sonatas then; and devil take the intermezzos.

NELLIE. But I don't want him to: I'm greedy: I want both of them myself. Oh, you silly old dear, don't you see, birthday presents don't really matter. They're nothing. I *have* my birthday present. God has given me my birthday present—life and health again, and this new glorious joy in men and women and all the wonderful touching loveliness of the world.

HERON. Thank God for it. Yes, I see that.

NELLIE. And you'll do as your little daughter wants? Both volumes, remember.

HERON. After all, you really are very fond of the sonatas . . . .

NELLIE. Oh, it'll be a perfectly lovely *pres-pres!*

HERON. For you or for me?

NELLIE. For both of us.

HERON. Oh, but you make me feel ashamed.

NELLIE. It is I who feel ashamed. I am not worthy. Oh, I ought to have known it all, even when I was lying up there. But you see, I wasn't twenty-one then. I didn't know how to know. Oh, this dreadful difficult task of growing up: it really is a job, isn't it? But I'm learning, yes I am; and you see, I'll grow to be a credit to you yet. Up there, it was so long, so—*so* many years; and then the codliver oil and the plaster of Paris and all that . . . . Oh! I thought I should never see anything again but blue skies and clouds and endless housetops. If there had only been one dear little window—something with the darling head of a human being peeping through . . . . But no! A tiny bit of gutter on the opposite roof, where the sparrows lived until the storm came and washed them out— That was the most I ever had.

HERON. Was that all: all you ever had?

NELLIE. No . . . . Oh, what a wretch I am!—I had more than that: I had you: I had my dear old Daddy, patient, watching, always by my bedside, taking care of me, loving me. Even when you were down here with your pupils, you used to make them practise all the things I loved best: *I* noticed it: I *can* see through you, can't I, dear? . . . . And then, when you used to climb back again to me, the lovely talks we had! Shall I ever forget them? How I used to wait for them, counting off the pupils one by one by the clock there. After all, it was worth being ill, for the talks we had. Perhaps, if I had been a little well daughter, I should never have heard all those great big wonderful things you taught me. About God. About life. About my own soul.

HERON. The teaching wasn't all on my side, my dear, believe me. You taught me loads of things, you never dreamed of. I don't think I've missed a single thing.

NELLIE. Daddy, you're laughing at me. Why, I said nothing. I never could say anything. I was always just a little dumb beast, with never a word to my mouth.

HERON. You've given me many. You'll be hearing of them by-and-bye. Everyone of them has gone smack into this—my symphony. You'll recognize them, if nobody else does.

NELLIE. So that's what you were up to, sir! And I mistook it for sympathy. And all the time, there you were, just getting material out of me for your music.

HERON. If you like to put it so, you impertinent little devil. No: I watched you because I loved you; and then because I loved you, you gave me ever such a lot of yourself for me to take care of; and I locked it up in my heart, until it grew too big for my heart to hold any longer, and now it's spilling out and away for all the world to wonder at. That's what it is, having a child like you.

Look! So far, there are little bits of you peeping out of every note.

They bend over the manuscript.

NELLIE. Well, isn't that clever of you! To say all that, so beautifully too, just in this way! . . . .

Do you know, I think it's you who have made me well again.

HERON. Indeed, I'd like to believe so, Sweetheart.

NELLIE. You're so alive yourself, that's why. And oh, my illness hasn't been wasted, after all! It was all turned to good for *you:* good for your work, I mean.

HERON. Yes, that's a nice pleasant thing to think about!

NELLIE. Daddy, what does it matter, what does anything matter, now I'm downstairs again? Downstairs! No more housetops; but the street, the real live street, and all the lovely people passing by. Oh, how my heart goes out to them. I want to shout to them. I don't think they know about themselves. They take it all so calmly. Oh, I love them, I love them! How I'd like to hug them, everyone of them, to my heart and say: "Isn't it beautiful? Isn't it sweet and beautiful to be alive?" Look at them! Look! Oh, how they walk and look about. Like little wild things in a wood. Aren't people just too darling for words? This one for instance: this one coming our way now: so unconscious: look at her: Father: this . . . .

Something makes her break off suddenly. Her father joins her at the window.

HERON. Where? . . . . Which do you mean?

NELLIE. The woman. Look! She . . . .

HERON. This one passing now?

NELLIE (*impulsively*). O you poor thing! . . . .

She draws back quickly into the shadows of the curtain.

Father, she heard me.

HERON. Did she? I don't think she did.

NELLIE. But the window's open. Didn't you see how—how strangely she looked at me?

HERON. She did look in; but I think the room's getting too . . . . See, the sun has set already.

NELLIE. Oh, those eyes! Those dreadful eyes! . . . .

HERON. Come away, my dear. Come into the room.

NELLIE. And straight into my own, as if . . . .

Heron. As if what?

Nellie. Challenging something.

Deep in thought, she crosses to the middle of the room.

There are some things in life I don't seem to understand.

Heron. You will find there are many things in life like that, my child.

Nellie. Yes, but some . . . . That look, for example . . . . As if she wanted me— Yes, me. And then . . . . Out again, like a candle-flame. I shall never even see her any more. That's strange, that's pitiful, too.

Heron. Oh, you are your mother's daughter. She was just like that.

Nellie. Was she?

She turns for a moment toward the portrait. Then, very simply:

Thank you.

Heron. They wanted her too, all the time. She was —well . . . . *necessary* to them. I always used to call her their Necessary Good. Her whole life was spent that way —being wanted, and giving herself. That's the way of women, good and bad— Always giving . . . . In the end it killed her, as noble work will sometimes kill.

Nellie. How?

Heron. God laid too great a burden of pity upon her heart, and at last it broke.

Nellie. Dear Mother!

They are silent for a space.

I wanted it to be a joyous blue sky of a birthday; but now it just seems as if some gray cloud had crept right across it. Isn't it curious sometimes how one look—just two eyes looking at you . . . . I'm sorry too, because . . . .

Heron. Why are you sorry?

Nellie. Because I had something else to tell you. I wanted it to come—clear: out of the blue sky. It's a secret.

Heron. What, another?

Nellie. Um: it's wonderful, it's beautiful!

Heron. I can imagine so. They are your only adjectives.

Nellie. I've been keeping it for you all day long. That's what the letter meant this morning at breakfast. The letter I wouldn't let you see.

Heron. Something nice, eh?

Nellie. It's going to happen almost any moment. It was due at the railway station about five minutes ago; and it hardly takes half an hour to come up here.

Heron. What, the secret?

Nellie. Yes, he's on the way now.

Heron. He? Oh, it's a gentleman secret, is it?

Nellie. Um. You'd never guess who he is, not if you tried ever so. Somebody you don't expect.

Heron. Coming here tonight, eh? Soon? . . . . (*Sharply.*) A *young* man?

Nellie. Young, and oh!—ever so handsome. Somebody who loves me.

HERON. Who?

NELLIE. Your son, sir. Brother Frank.

He takes this more gravely than she expected.

HERON. So Frank's coming home, is he? Well, it's about time.

NELLIE. Father, aren't you glad to hear it?

HERON. Yes, I'm glad, right enough. He's my own boy, all said and done. How long is he intending to favor us?

NELLIE. Well, that's the pity of it. He only has two weeks' holiday, and can't spare us more than a couple of days. But one of them's my birthday.

HERON. Hm. Is he in want of anything, do you think? Any—money, for instance?

NELLIE. Father, isn't that just a little bit unkind?

HERON. Well you see, after two whole years of practical neglect . . . . And then, there are other things.

NELLIE. Oh, Frank isn't as bad as you think. He's young: he's irresponsible; and even if he does fling money about— Well, haven't you yourself often said that only rich people take money seriously?

HERON. Oh, it isn't the money . . . . Though by-the-bye, he never even acknowledged that last cheque I sent him.

NELLIE. Well, he's selfish, he's thoughtless, I know; but we are all of us that, when we're young. You should see the beautiful letter he wrote me.

HERON. Yes, they very often can. Very beautiful—

letters. Oh, these lads of ours! How they can wound us to the heart.

NELLIE. Remember what that friend of his told us about him—you know, the man who called to see us: the man who brought me the orchid.

HERON. Yes, I remember the friend. The man who could bring you an orchid must be a bit of a leper.

NELLIE. Why, Daddy, whatever do you mean?

HERON. Nothing, my child, nothing. Just a bit of symbolism, that's all.

NELLIE. Well, he said Frank was *all right. Quite a man of the world*—that's what he said. I always like to think of him like that. Out in the world, the great big world, doing things.

HERON. I don't think I very much believe in what the world calls right. What I want my boy to be is right, *inside*. Right, God's way: not the world's. If I could be sure of that . . . .

NELLIE. Well, you wait till you see the letter. You'll find a difference, I can promise you. I must confess, I felt a little bit doubtful myself, when I wrote and begged him to come; but that was mean of me, because you see, he's coming.

HERON. Oh, you had to write and remind him, did you?

NELLIE. Why, of course. I couldn't expect him to remember my birthday, all by himself.

HERON. Well, all I can say is, if he didn't . . . .

NELLIE. Daddy, Daddy! . . . .

HERON. Well, well, there, I'll say no more about it.

NELLIE. No: I think you'd better not.

HERON. Oh, we men! I'm afraid we are all alike!

NELLIE. There *are* differences, Daddy. And you are one of them, bless you. And so, when Frank comes . . . . when he is actually here, in the room with you . . . .

HERON. Oh, I'll behave myself, if that's what you're driving at.

NELLIE. Father, if anybody heard you, they'd think you didn't love him any longer.

HERON (*hotly*). I do love him. That's why he irritates me so.

NELLIE. Remember, you haven't seen him for two years. He must have changed a deal in that time.

HERON. He's such an argumentative little devil . . . . That's what always gets my back up.

NELLIE. All you have to do, is to keep off the one subject —music.

HERON. Oh, I know he has nothing but contempt for my work.

NELLIE. My dear, he is only a boy. You are a grown man, remember.

HERON (*like a child*). Oh, am I? Well . . . . Look here, Nellie, I do love the lad: you know I do; but I don't think children know sometimes, what pain . . . . inside here . . . . when you're a father . . . . Why, I've had that little chap in my arms, night after night, hundreds of times.

NELLIE (*creeping up to him*). That's my Daddy!

HERON (*brightly*). And tomorrow morning, the very first thing, I'll go out with a big butcher's knife, and see what sort of a fatted calf there is about the place.

NELLIE. Well, you had better be ready with a ring and a robe and a pair of shoes *at once;* because he'll be here in twenty minutes. Less.

Now, what I thought was this. We wouldn't make a grand party of it, with a lot of silly people about. Frank's getting his dinner on the train; and we're only middle-day folk—not like him: so I thought . . . . Just Birthday Cake and Tea, like when we were kids— See?

And then we could all sit round cosy together, a regular family affair, just the four of us and nobody else.

HERON. Nellie, this is genius!

NELLIE. Thank you, sir. Just our four selves, see?

HERON. I get your point. Just our . . . . eh?

He pauses, interrogatively.

NELLIE (*with intention*). *Four* selves, sir.

HERON. What . . . . Alfred?

NELLIE. No: try again. Just *us* four, you know.

HERON. The table is set for four, certainly. You, me, Frank . . . . Who's the mystic fourth?

NELLIE. Oh, you can guess, if you try.

He shakes his head.

Mother.

HERON. Now, who but my little Nellie could ever have dreamed of a thing like that?

NELLIE. We can think she's sitting there all the time, looking at us, loving us. Why shouldn't people be set for, just because they're dead? Dead's alive, isn't it? And then perhaps, even a morsel of cake there and a cup of tea, just as if . . . .

There's something sacramental about it, don't you think?

He presses her silently to his heart, and then brings her over to the settee, where they sit.

Their faces can still be seen, but more and more vaguely in the advancing dusk.

HERON. Nellie, for a person with a naturally loving heart, I must say you know just how to stab where it will hurt the most.

NELLIE. That must be the artist in me, Daddy. I got that bad little habit from you.

HERON. Well, perhaps you did. But you got your pity—your sacred pity—from Her.

The thought makes them silent a little.

NELLIE. Why did she have to die, I wonder, just because of that?

HERON. Things hurt her so: the things she had to know: the people she mixed with, had to deal with . . . . I can't begin to tell you the sort of people she—was a sister to.

NELLIE. Why, what sort were they?

HERON. Oh mostly—women.

NELLIE. Women . . . . (*Half under her breath.*) What was it, started it—in *her?*

Heron. It was a tragical experience, early in life, when she was about your age. Somebody who had been a friend of hers, a school-fellow, somebody whom she might have helped; but she did not know. Nobody ever told her. She had been brought up—innocently. Then it became too late. And the friend . . . . Well, the poor girl died. Tragically. Horribly. Her whole life was spent for them after that.

Nellie. For them. Whom?

Heron. Her sisters.

Nellie. I think I understand. I've often thought of that, too.

Heron. Have you? I don't think you have.

Nellie. Father, indeed I have; and it's pitiful: it wrings my heart. The poor—I mean the really very poor, not poor like us—do have a dreadful time of it.

Heron. It's not the poor, I'm speaking of; though God knows, that's often enough a part of the problem, too.

Nellie. Problem. What problem?

Heron. The problem of—our sisters.

Nellie. Daddy, I don't know what you mean. I don't really. And I'm usually so quick at getting your subtle allusions.

Heron. Some other time, dearest. Not tonight. Not on your birthday.

Nellie. But don't you see, that's just why. I'm twenty-one. I'm a woman. Besides . . . . If you mean . . . .

Heron. If I mean what?

NELLIE. If you mean that perhaps my sisters are . . . . wanting me . . . .

HERON (*quickly*). No, no: not that. Not you. I was only trying to make you understand something about your mother.

NELLIE. It killed her, you say . . . .

HERON. Yes, there's the trouble. You have to pay so much, if you take up that kind of thing.

NELLIE. My mother . . . . The pity of it killed her . . . .

HERON. That and the work.

NELLIE. I see. There's something you have to *do*.

HERON. Yes, but not you, my child. Not you.

NELLIE. But why not I? I'm a woman, too. Like others. Like Mother.

HERON. Oh, but you are speaking in ignorance: in deep utter innocent ignorance, like a child.

NELLIE. Then teach me. Give me light. Let me know.

HERON. It would destroy your happiness.

NELLIE. How can it, if it's the truth? Truth can't destroy happiness.

HERON. This truth can. *Your* happiness.

NELLIE. Then perhaps my happiness is at fault.

HERON. You said only just now: *How beautiful life is!*

NELLIE. Well, isn't it?

HERON. I don't know. We artists like to dream it is. Little children play as though it were. Some few great saints in the world seem to find it so, in spite of everything, unto the end. But sometimes, I don't know, I don't know.

NELLIE. But why? Oh, Father, can't you tell me why?

HERON. Because of sin—man's sin. Because of destruction—woman's destruction. That's why.

NELLIE *thinks this over for a moment or so. Then, as to herself:*

NELLIE. I'll get to know more about this. Something inside me urges me. Perhaps it's Mother.

There is a long silence between them, as the darkness deepens.

Presently, there is heard a sound outside, through the window. Footsteps. Then two voices, a man's and a woman's.

MAN. 'Ere you, Daisy. What are you spying around for? This ain't your beat.

WOMAN. Don't you speak to me. Keep off, I tell you!

MAN (*quite good-humoredly*). O you beauty!

WOMAN. Light your lamp, man, and get along on your rounds.

MAN. Well, I can't take you along with me; so "just one kiss before we part" you know . . . . (*Aggrieved.*) Oh, orl right, sulky. Since you're one o' them sort! . . . .

He lights the street lamp, which is gas and can be seen through the window. It sends a sickly glare over the piano, reaching the portrait on the wall. The father and the daughter still sit in the gloom of the settee.

Well, so long, duckie. Ain't yer going ter say good night? Oh, orl right then! . . . .

He clatters off on his rounds, singing the following edifying song:

(*Song*)

You'd take 'er for a milliner,
Wivaht no thought of ill in 'er,
  She looks that soft and artless in the eye;
She'd not so much as walk with yer,
To 'ear 'er kind of talk with yer;
  But ain't she just a warm un on the sly!

His voice dies away not unmelodiously in the distance.

When all is silent again, the girl speaks:

NELLIE. Let it be Brahms, Father. Something beautiful. Just to take the taste away, you know.

HERON. As we are? In the dark?

NELLIE. Yes. You'll just have time before Frank comes.

He rises and goes to the piano.

HERON. Well, what is it to be?

NELLIE. The Intermezzo, of course. *My* Intermezzo.

He commences the "E-flat Minor Intermezzo": Andante, largo e mesto; Op. 118, No. 6.

The light of the street lamp falls upon him from behind: his face is in deep shadow. The girl in her white dress, down on the settee, looks like a little pale ghost.

He reaches the transitional chord in bar 20, when the girl speaks:

NELLIE. How wonderful! . . . . It's as though Mother's spirit had just entered the room.

> JOHN HERON *holds the chord through her speech, and passes on, continuing the Intermezzo.*

> NELLIE *rises softly and joins him at the piano, resting one hand lovingly upon his shoulder. Presently, she turns away to the window, leaning against the frame, looking out. The light of the street lamp is upon her face.*

> JOHN HERON *reaches the transitional chord in bar 40, when his daughter's sudden exclamation stops him short.*

NELLIE. Father! . . . .

HERON. *Oh*, Nellie! . . . . What is it, my child?

NELLIE. She's out there. Look! She's moving away. She's been listening.

HERON. Why, it's the very same woman.

NELLIE. Ssh! She'll hear you. I'll . . . . I'd like to speak to her.

HERON. No, Nellie, I . . . .

> *He restrains her;*

I don't want you to, Nellie. Not you.

NELLIE. But if she's wanting me? . . . .

HERON. Nonsense: she doesn't want you. She was just listening to old Brahms.

NELLIE. Yes, that was rather nice of her, too.

HERON. Come, let's have a light on the subject. Where are the matches? Oh . . . .

NELLIE. There *is* a sort of magic in it—meeting people's eyes. And I thought I should never see her any more.

HERON. Come, come, my child. Frank will be here before you can say Jack Robinson.

NELLIE. Oh, how selfish of me. I had forgotten Frank.

JOHN HERON *has struck a match.*

HERON. Now (*indicating the candles*) do I light these things?

NELLIE. No, no: that's my ceremony, later. You just light the gas, whilst I go and look after the kettle. It's Mary's night out, you know.

When she goes to the door, she turns, the light of the street lamp reaching her up there.

Oh, Daddy, perhaps life *is* a little beautiful, after all. Frank's coming.

And she goes out, the gladness struggling back again into her eyes.

JOHN HERON, *left alone, lights the gas, and then his pipe. He goes to the right, and throws the match into the fire. He turns up the room, catches sight of his wife's portrait, stops, and stands looking at it.*
Then:

HERON. What a curious child! . . . .

He thinks a little: then goes to the piano, and plays over the pianissimo phrase, bars 17–20, of *the Intermezzo, ending with the transitional chord first mentioned above.*

Hm! So it is: so it is.

A moment later there is heard a hearty rat-tat-tat at the street door.

It's my boy! . . . .

A rushing of glad feet along the passage, a pause, and a babble of laughter and voices, as brother and sister meet.

And they burst into the room.

FRANK *is a handsome young fellow, quite lovable, almost likable. He throws down his coat and his hat and bag, anywhere, anyhow, as he enters.*

FRANK. Let's get rid of these dratted things, and I'll kiss you again. Now, where's your mouth! . . . . By Jove though, isn't she a spanker! Why you're almost as big as . . . . Filled out, too! Here, wait a moment . . . .

He fishes into his bag and brings out a parcel done up.

Many happy returns of the day, and here's a—what was it, we used to call them?—here's a *pres-pres* for you.

NELLIE. Oh! Frank!!

She begins tugging at the string, first with her fingers, then with her teeth.

FRANK. Look at her! Mind your teeth, now. You won't get any more kisses, if you spoil your pretty teeth. Here, try this.

NELLIE. There's a pretty knife for a man! Mother of pearl! Where did you get it?

FRANK. That? Oh—a girl.

NELLIE. A girl gave you a knife! Well . . . .

FRANK. Why, what's the matter?

NELLIE. Cuts love, you know.

FRANK. Well, perhaps there wasn't much to cut in this case.

NELLIE. Frank: you're engaged!

FRANK. Me? Not if I know it!

NELLIE. Now for the *pres-pres!*

> *She attacks the string with the knife in her clumsy woman's way. (They really don't know how to use knives.)*

> FRANK, *who has been including his father in the above conversation, by all sorts of knowing little winks and nods, now addresses him directly:*

FRANK. Well, Dad!

HERON. My boy, my dear boy!

> *They shake hands, shyly, as men will, after long absence.*

NELLIE. Father's going to kill a fatted calf for you tomorrow. Had your dinner?

FRANK. Got it on the train. Fatted calf, eh? . . . . Well, that's better than railway *patie de fois gras* and champagne. Well now, how's things? How's the music?

HERON (*pleased*). Oh, the music's all right, thankee, my boy. Got three new pupils; and they've voted me that raise in salary up at the church, at last! How's electricity?

FRANK. A, one. Things going ahead like wildfire over yonder. Think they ought to be doing something for me, the way they're making money.

HERON. That's good. Oh, I'm doing famously, I can tell you. Why, only this very morning . . . .

But NELLIE *has opened her parcel;*

NELLIE. Oh, Frank, how beautiful! . . . . Daddy, look!

HERON. Yes, isn't it? Frank, only this very . . . . Yes, beautiful . . . . It was at breakfast time . . . .

NELLIE. Real silver, too! It's simply too lovely for . . . . What is it?

FRANK. Oh, just . . . . Powder-puff or something.

NELLIE (*blankly*). Powder? . . . .

FRANK. Yes, rub on your nose, you know.

NELLIE. Oh. I'll get some at once.

HERON. Frank, we were just sitting down to breakfast when the postman . . . .

NELLIE. Oh, but you naughty boy. You must have paid an awful lot of money for a thing like this.

FRANK. Nonsense. What's the use of having a pretty woman on the premises, if you don't spend money on her? Now, Father. What did the postman say he had for breakfast this morning?

HERON. I didn't mention the postman. I was going to tell you about my royalties.

FRANK. About your what?

HERON. Got a cheque, my boy. Came this morning. A cheque for royalties on my first published song.

FRANK. First, eh? You don't mean to tell me you've been publishing any more of them.

HERON (*hastily*). No, no, it's the same song—the old one, you know. But just fancy! Royalties! Why, I'll be able to buy almost all the music I want, soon, with all these royalties pouring in.

FRANK. What do you think of that, now? Father's music turning out valuable in his old age.

NELLIE. It's true. Isn't it splendid?

FRANK. Splendid isn't the word for it. Look here, Dad. Guess what. I saw a copy of that old song of yours the other day, for sale.

HERON. Did you hear that, Nellie? What did I tell you? I'm getting known.

FRANK. I tell you, it made me feel as proud as punch.

HERON. I'll bet it did, bless you. Where was this?

FRANK. Oh, down in the city somewhere . . . .

HERON (*to* NELLIE). *City*, mind you! One of these big places, I'll be bound, where they *do* keep an intelligent eye on a man's work.

FRANK. Well, I can't say that exactly, Father. The place was quite small.

HERON (*conceding the point*). Well, that's a trifle.

FRANK. It was a second-hand bookstall.

HERON. Oh.

And he cogitates solemnly as NELLIE *sweeps into the conversation.*

NELLIE. And now, dearly beloved brethren, for the real business of the evening. You've had dinner, and so have we. Nothing remains therefore, but for me to introduce you to my birthday cake. Birthday Cake: this is my brother, Frank.

FRANK *contemplates the cake attentively for a moment: then bows;*

FRANK. How do you do, Miss? Ah—Saucy! She's winking candles at me.

NELLIE. Isn't he funny? Cakes aren't *shes*.

FRANK. This one is. I say, Nellie, have I got to eat all this?

NELLIE. It's all very well, you talking! You were always the greedy-greedy when you were a kid.

FRANK. Fate is just. I accept my punishment.

NELLIE. Pig! I'll go and make the tea.

She dances to the door, and turns;

Black tea: strong tea: tea like coffee: tea with all the tannin in it: the kind of tea that you and Daddy like! Ugh!

And with a grimace and a kiss of the hand, she vanishes.

JOHN HERON *wakes up sadly as from a trance;*

HERON. Frank, tell me. What price were they asking for that little cradle song of mine?

FRANK. Father, to tell you the truth, I couldn't exactly reckon that out. It was one of a bundle, offered job lot.

HERON. Hm! . . . . Look here, Frank, you don't understand anything about music, I know that; but did there happen to be a name like Johannes Brahms tucked away in the oblivion of that bundle?

FRANK. Brahms? No, I should have spotted him at once. He's the chap you're always thumping at, isn't he?

HERON. Then if Brahms wasn't there, who in the devil's name was?

FRANK. I don't think I quite . . . . Yes, I do. There was a fellow called Strauss for one.

HERON. Richard? ! ! . . . .

FRANK. Yes, you've got it: that's it—Richard.

JOHN HERON *goes and sits down on the keyboard of the piano. In the bass. The cacophony relieves him.*

And NELLIE *enters with the tea.*

NELLIE. And now, we're all going to be really happy, aren't we?

Isn't this glorious, Frank? *You* never saw me up and about and able to make tea before.

FRANK. I've been thinking I ought to have written to you oftener, Nellie; but somehow things . . . . Well, I'm sorry I didn't, now.

NELLIE. Dear Frank! . . . . Oh, I tell you, I'm growing: growing fast. I'm going to become a terror in this household. I've commenced to take up some of my responsibilities already.

This tickles FRANK *exceedingly.*

Well, of all the ungrateful . . . . Brother, stop laughing!

FRANK. Responsibilities! You! . . . .

NELLIE. Frank! Frank! Father, do something to him.

HERON. Well, you know, my child, tea isn't very much of a responsibility.

NELLIE. That's all very well. *You* don't know who made the soup you had today at dinner.

HERON. Soup? What soup?

NELLIE. The soup you turned up your nose at and said was salty.

HERON. And so it was—damnably salty.

NELLIE. Well, I made it, see? It was my first attempt. But I start rissoles tomorrow.

Both men look at each other weakly.

FRANK (*suddenly*). Father, I'm going away again tonight.

HERON. Tonight? What for?

FRANK. Before Nellie makes shipwreck of me, with her responsibilities.

NELLIE (*with mock gravity*). You know, Frank, you've got the makings of a really bad man in you.

I tell you, you won't laugh at my sense of responsibility, by the time I've done. I've got lots of little plans working in my head: plans much more important than soup and rissoles: plans about life, about my work in the world, about—real things.

FRANK. Bless her, isn't she sweet?

NELLIE. But come, this isn't tea. Now, Frank, there's you. There's you, Daddy. Here's me—I mean *I*. And over there is . . . .

She has planted FRANK *to the right of the table, her* FATHER *to the left,* HERSELF *at the bottom with her back to the audience; and she is now indicating the vacant place at the head of the table.*

FRANK. Who?

NELLIE (*softly*). Our mother.

FRANK *takes this in: then he gets up and kisses her.*

FRANK. Good kid.

He goes back to his place. NELLIE *is pouring out the tea.*

NELLIE. Well, that ought to be black enough to please a nigger. Please, Daddy . . . .

He places the cup at the head of the table.

Oh, I'm sure she's there! . . . . Sugar, Frank?

FRANK. Three for me. Plenty of cream.

NELLIE. You're like Daddy. He's the sweetest tooth of any man I ever met.

HERON. Well, you've not met many, you know.

NELLIE. I know all about them, for all that. I haven't lived twenty-one years in the house with you, Daddy dear, without getting to know everything there is to know about men.

FRANK. If you learned everything you know about men from the Dad, Nellie, you're still in the teething stage. It's like one baby trying to teach another.

HERON (*laughing*). You impudent young dog! What do you know about it, I'd like to know!

FRANK. I know more about it than you, Dad. I tell you, I've been keeping my eyes open, out there in the city. I've been studying life.

HERON. *Life!* In the *city!*

FRANK. Oh, life isn't everything you think it is in poky little holes like this. We men of the world—of the real world, mind you . . . .

HERON. Hark at him! If you men of the world, as you call yourselves, think you can teach . . . .

FRANK. Look here, Dad, you mean well, I know that. Lots of old gentlemen mean well. But you're simply not born yet. Do you understand? Get that into your head, dear old chap, and be humble-minded.

HERON. Well, I'm . . . .

All of which has been done with excellent good humor, both sides; but now NELLIE *thinks it best to step in;*

NELLIE. Now, now, gentlemen, no argufying. Father, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, setting up your opinion against your son's! No! I won't hear a word of your defence! . . . . Besides . . . . This is a serious point in the ceremonial of the evening. I'm going to light the candles.

FRANK. If you'd only let me know beforehand, I'd have brought over a full electrical rigout for you.

NELLIE. Frank, you decadent! Candles are a part of the mystery. Can't you understand?

She rises. Her back is still to the audience.

Look at them, the darlings! Twenty-one of them. There's a candle for every one of the years I have been in the world: the first little cradle years, when I couldn't even walk and talk: the dear happy school years when Mother was alive, all sunny brightness and I never knew: the long weary plaster of Paris and codliver oil years, up there in my bedroom; and last of all, this blessed beautiful Now, when I'm downstairs and strong again, and a grown woman. Thank God for every one of them!

And the first little candle—that little white plump one in the middle—is going to be lighted by Mother. I'll be Mother.

She runs round to the head of the table, and now faces the audience.

Brethren, rise. The ceremony.

Both men rise obediently.

Frank, lower the gas a little: just . . . . Thanks. Daddy, give me a match.

They do so. The gas is just above the table, sending down a pale light.

Nellie *lights the middle candle. The ceremony holds them for a moment.*

That's how I began—a little weak flame, lighted on earth by Mother. And now she's gone, and I'm grown up. Isn't life strange?

Dear God, make me like her. Make use of me. Give me pity, that I may spend myself for others. Like my mother.

There is heard a low, slow knocking at the street door. Three knocks.

Oh, how it made me jump!

HERON. Who can it be, I wonder.

NELLIE. Frank, you answer. There's only ourselves in the house.

FRANK *goes out of the room.*

HERON. Rather an awkward moment for visitors, isn't it?

NELLIE. Hark! It's a woman talking . . . .

HERON. Perhaps it's only some poor . . . .

NELLIE. Ssh! . . . .

FRANK *comes back into the room.*

FRANK. It's a woman. Wants to see *you*. "The young lady" she says.

NELLIE. What does she want with me?

FRANK. I don't know. "Must see the young lady." Wants you. That's all I could get out of her.

NELLIE. Wants me! Father . . . . Ask her in here.

FRANK *knits his brows thoughtfully.*

FRANK. In here, eh?

NELLIE. Yes.

FRANK (*significantly*). Well . . . .

He speaks through the open doorway:

Won't you come in?

The WOMAN *enters. She is tall, dark, sombre. She is dressed rather well, but quietly, with some taste; and is obviously poor. Her face has strange-*

ly enough a certain Madonna-like beauty about it—a beauty smitten across by some tragical and nameless horror.

She stands for a moment in the doorway, silent, her eyes fixed upon the young girl. Indeed, she hardly ever looks away from her; and it will be observed, she never once addresses directly either of the two men.

NELLIE. Father, I knew it! It's the . . . .

There is a long pause. FRANK *is near the fireplace; his* FATHER, *by the settee;* NELLIE, *by the* WOMAN, *facing her.*

WOMAN. I oughtn't to have come in, by rights. I have no right here, at all: no human right. I knew that, the moment I entered the passage. But I'm here; and I can't go back again, unless you tell me. That's strange, too. Here. In this room. With *you.*

NELLIE. I am sure, you are very . . . .

WOMAN. No. Not if you knew.

FRANK *looks up quickly, suspiciously.*

FRANK. Perhaps, if it's any help you want, my father, or even myself . . . .

The WOMAN *turns a long, clear look upon him; then the eyes travel back again to* NELLIE.

WOMAN. Perhaps I ought to go away again. I will, if you tell me. Back to—my own place.

NELLIE. No, no, I want you to stay. I do, really.

HERON. I'm not quite sure, Nellie; but if . . . .

WOMAN. Maybe, he's right. You'd better let me go.

NELLIE. I can't. I don't know why. But there's something holding me; and I want you.

WOMAN. God knows, I want you.

NELLIE. That settles it then.

WOMAN. But you don't know me.

NELLIE. I know you by sight. I saw you tonight, out there through the window. You were listening to the music.

WOMAN. Yes, I was listening—to the music.

NELLIE. So you see, there is some kind of bond between us, and therefore . . . .

WOMAN. But you don't know me. You don't know what I am.

NELLIE. I don't want to know. I only know that you are very unhappy. I saw that, out there.

WOMAN. What is my unhappiness, that it should touch the innocent heart of a flower like you?

NELLIE. You're a woman. And I'm one, too.

The WOMAN *considers this for a moment: then she says slowly:*

WOMAN. I'm a woman, am I? Thank you. I had forgotten.

NELLIE. But don't you see, you love people because you love them. Just because they're people. You don't mind anything about their being . . . . . well—poor.

WOMAN. It's not poverty, I'm thinking of.

Nellie. Well then, because they're unhappy . . . .

Woman. I'm not thinking of unhappiness.

Nellie. Then won't you tell me what it is?

Woman. It's a word, I've only just learned. An old-fashioned word. I heard it through the window.

Nellie. Tell it me.

Woman. Sin.

Frank *cannot conceal his irritation any longer; though he tries as far as he knows how, not to hurt the* Woman's *feelings:*

Frank. Yes, but look here, Nellie, if this poor woman is in any trouble or anything, perhaps some other time . . . . with my father, alone . . . . or again, a note to the clergyman of the parish— After all, they're paid to look after cases like these. Surely, it isn't quite appropriate for you, a young girl . . . . And at a time like this, too!

He turns to the Woman *herself:*

You see, my sister is only an inexperienced child: she doesn't understand. Naturally, her sympathies . . . . And then again, her immaturity . . . .
What do you think, Father? Don't you think I'm right?

Heron. Eh, what's that? . . . . I beg your pardon: I don't think I quite . . . .

Frank. Oh Dad, dear old chap, do wake up! This isn't the time to be mooning about music!

Heron (*gently*). It wasn't music, my boy. I was thinking about something—about somebody—else.

Frank. Oh, all right then, if you weren't listening!

Washing his hands of the whole matter, he flings himself disgustedly into the comfortable armchair, and bites his nails.

The WOMAN'S *eyes have never left the girl.*

WOMAN. Well? . . . .

NELLIE. Stay. Be at home, won't you? Won't you take your hat off?

The WOMAN *obeys mechanically, still looking at her.*

And now we can go right on from where we left off before you came in. You see, you happen to have arrived at a very important moment in my life. I'm twenty-one. This is my birthday party. It's really a very silly little birthday party—only cake and tea; but if you don't mind joining us . . . .

WOMAN. Thank you: I don't think I want to eat, here.

NELLIE. Well, at least, a nice warm cup of tea . . . .

WOMAN. Thank you: I don't think I want to drink, here. But if you don't mind, I would just like to sit down a little—only a little. I've been walking.

She sits down at the head of the table.

NELLIE. Now, that's just what I was hoping you would do—to sit down there. In that place, I mean. Do you know, whom that place was set for?

The WOMAN *shakes her head.*

It was set for somebody very precious to all of us in this room. It was set for my mother.

The WOMAN *rises instinctively, her eyes widening.*

That's her portrait behind you. Perhaps I ought to tell you: she's dead.

The WOMAN'S *head turns slowly toward the picture.*

So you will take her place, won't you? *She*'d like you to, if she were here. She *is* here.

WOMAN. She is very like you.

NELLIE. Thank you. Then won't you?

The WOMAN *looks at her steadily;*

WOMAN. Yes, I will.

She sits down. FRANK *takes out his pipe and sticks it viciously into his mouth.*

NELLIE. Now, Daddy . . . . Now, Frank . . . .

FRANK. Thank you, I'm very comfortable where I am. If you don't mind, I'll smoke.
Oh, but perhaps *you* . . . .

After which courtesy, he smiles ironically into the fire. The WOMAN *makes no answer. So he lights up; and at certain points in the conversation following, puffs vigorously.*

NELLIE. Perhaps after all, it's better, just us two women. They like their pipes, you know.

Which gives her FATHER *the hint to light up and sit down on the settee. He is more or less in the gloom: the two women are in the pale light of the candle and lowered gas; and the young man in the red glow of the fire.*

After a silence, the WOMAN *begins to speak:*

WOMAN. I suppose that's what first drew me in—your innocence. I felt I had to come. I felt I had something to say to you. A sort of message from the underworld. You see, young girls don't know.

NELLIE. Yes, I've been realizing that, all day long—how appallingly ignorant of life, I am.

WOMAN. But I don't want to hurt you, mind—not really hurt you—not hurt the thing inside you: your innocence.

NELLIE. Go on.

WOMAN. And you've got to listen very carefully. Because I'm going to say things that have never been said so openly before, not in front of young girls. But since I'm . . . . for the moment . . . .

Something almost beautiful illumines her face;

your mother . . . . and you're my child . . . .

NELLIE. Oh, I understand, indeed I understand. Do go on.

WOMAN. Then listen.
I suppose you *do* know how babies come into the world, don't you? They *did* tell you that?

NELLIE. I don't think I quite . . . . What do you mean exactly?

WOMAN. The physical fact. The natural beautiful physical fact. How they come.

NELLIE *is silent for a moment. Then she answers in a low voice:*

NELLIE. Yes, I know that.

WOMAN. I'm glad. Some parents are so foul-minded, they don't even teach their children that.

FRANK (*under his breath*). Well, my God! . . . .

And he taps out his pipe on the hob.

WOMAN. And next: have you ever been in love? In love with a man, I mean. Have you?

NELLIE (*her head bent low*). Yes . . . .

WOMAN. Have you ever thought what it meant, to marry him? *All* that it meant? To live with him, to give up everything for him, to be with him, by his side, always? Always? . . . .

NELLIE. Something of all this, yes—at times . . . . Perhaps vaguely, unconsciously. I don't know that I ever let myself think of it quite so clearly until now.

WOMAN. Try and think of it clearly, actually. Don't be ashamed, afraid. Don't think of it merely as some vague romantic bliss, some idle paradise of happy-ever-afterwards. Think of it as it is. To speak more plainly: Have you ever thought of yourself as a wife, as a man's wife? Have you ever thought of yourself as a mother, as the mother of a man's child?

NELLIE. Oh, but you hurt me, you hurt me!

WOMAN. I don't want to hurt you.

NELLIE. I can't help it really. But something inside of me . . . .

WOMAN. Look at it steadily. It won't hurt you, if you look at it steadily.

NELLIE. I'm trying to. Indeed I am.

Woman. It's really beautiful, if you only look at it steadily. It must be beautiful; because children are very beautiful.

Nellie. Forgive me: I'm ashamed of myself: only I wasn't ready for it. But I do see: really I do. Yes, I do.

Woman. Well now: can you imagine a woman being like that, living like that, with a man—a man!—intimately, daily, hourly . . . . without even ever . . . .

Nellie (*delicately*). Without children? Is that what you mean?

Woman. No, I didn't mean that; though God knows, there's that also for some of us.

Nellie. Then what did you mean? Without what?

Woman. It's difficult to tell you . . . . Your face . . . . Turn your face away from me.

Nellie *does so, wonderingly.*

What I meant was . . . . without loving him, without gladness, joy, desire of children in the heart: even despising, loathing him: without human feeling—not even the feeling of an outraged beast.

Nellie. Marry a man, live with him, be all that to him, without—love! It's not possible!

Woman. It happens.

Nellie. In this world? This beautiful world?

Woman. Throughout the length and breadth of it.

Nellie. Oh! Oh!

Woman. There are millions of women like that in the world, unmarried—and married!

NELLIE. Oh!

WOMAN. Yes, have your horror out. It hurts me; but it is well you should see the vileness of it.

NELLIE. But a woman! I can't imagine . . . . How can she? It's not possible.

WOMAN. In hell, all things are possible.

NELLIE. But the man himself! Her man! Even he . . . .

WOMAN. *He! One* man! Do you talk of *one* man? Her loathing is not for *one!* There's many of them! Many men! . . . . Ugh! Hundreds!

NELLIE. Oh, but it can't be true. Life's not like that. This is God's world! Why, Christ came over nineteen hundred years ago!

WOMAN. So I've heard men say.

NELLIE. It's *not* true. How do you know?

WOMAN. It *is* true. I *do* know.

NELLIE. But how? How?

WOMAN. Can you bear it?

The girl bows her head, weakly.

I am one of them.

She receives it dumbly, like something stricken. There is a long silence. After a while, something begins to work in her face; but whether horror or pity cannot yet be seen. At last, she falters:

NELLIE. I didn't understand. I only thought you were poor, wretched, unhappy.

WOMAN. And so I am. Poor! Cast out! Beggared in body and in soul! Lost, lost forever!

The girl's soul stands trembling over infinite abysses. She steadies herself by a great effort, looking calmly with great eyes at the WOMAN. *Then all the youth, the innocence, the understanding, the untouched virgin of her soul, leap out in a pure white flame of pity;*

NELLIE. Oh, but I love you! Don't be lost, don't be lost. Look up! Be saved!

And so they stand, face to face, virgin and harlot. Sisters.

FRANK *has risen from the armchair. For the moment, the situation has held him too. Now in a towering fury, he lets himself go;*

FRANK. Father, this is disgusting! Are you going to stand by and see your daughter . . . . Here, what's that damned light down for? Let's have no more of this theatrical tomfoolery! . . . . Lot of blasted rot! . . . .

He turns up the gas savagely, flooding the place with light. Himself, too.

Father, do you hear me? Are you going to stand all this blatant indecency being poured wholesale into your daughter's ears?

HERON (*rising*). The living God being my helper, yes, I am.

FRANK. Then all I can say, is . . . .

WOMAN. Oh, they don't like these things spoken about, these men—some men. Not out loud, you understand. In their clubs perhaps, or their drinking saloons, or in the adulterous high parliaments and senates where they sit like gods and manage the world for us women—in snickers, and mucky whispers, and liquor-sodden imbecilities; but not out aloud! Oh, it hurts them: makes them uncomfortable: disturbs their peace—out loud! They don't mind what deeds they *do*, hidden away in the black darkness of their lives, unknown, out of sight—and God in Heaven is blind! But you mustn't ever speak about it! Not out aloud, you understand! Not aloud, like this!

FRANK. It's because of this young girl, I tell you, this unspotted girl . . . . my sister . . . .

WOMAN. Oh yes, their wives, their daughters, their little sisters must be sheltered: *they* must be protected: no harm come to their pure ears. Christ's blood! What about *our* lives? What about us?

FRANK. You! Why you're only a common . . . .

HERON. Frank! . . . .

WOMAN. Oh, I know the word, well enough! We are only the dirt out of the streets yonder. Man's dirt! Husbands', fathers' dirt: dirt of sons and brothers! . . . .

FRANK. Father! . . . . Nellie, stop your ears!

WOMAN. I'll make them listen to me. I'll cry out upon them. I'll discover their nakedness, their shame. This voice of mine shall be prophetic and reach to the uttermost parts of the earth.

NELLIE. But do you mean to tell me that men . . . . Men, like my father here, like brother, like Alfred . . . . Men, made in the image of God . . . .

WOMAN. Some men: many men: oh, you can know them, if you watch them carefully enough.

NELLIE. But their faces . . . . Their beautiful good faces . . . . Oh! . . . .

WOMAN. Watch them—the straight ones won't mind. Watch them. They can't hide themselves, if you watch carefully enough. Track them down. Don't leave off watching till you find their souls.

NELLIE. But how can I—an inexperienced girl . . . .

WOMAN. That's why! That's what your innocence is for.

NELLIE. My innocence . . . .

WOMAN. Yes, if it's alive: not asleep or idle or dreaming.

NELLIE. Then innocence is—something that must be *done?*

WOMAN. Yes, not drugged, not put away and wrapped in cotton wool. It's something violent: unresting. Something that must never leave off working.

NELLIE. I see, I see: the dove and the serpent: you must have them both . . . . Oh, but the waste, the waste, the wickedness of it! All these years. Something ought to have been done by now. And He died so long ago! Surely, our religions, our many, many hundreds of religions ought to have saved us!

WOMAN. They have been too busy damning one another.

NELLIE. But the Law— What's the Law for? The Law cannot possibly overlook a thing like this?

WOMAN. Oh, it punishes the woman right enough, when it catches her.

NELLIE. Punishes? . . . . But the man . . . . What of the man?

WOMAN. Man makes the Law.

NELLIE. Yes, but when he makes it about a thing like this . . . .

WOMAN. This thing is recognised by some Christian countries, legally. Recognised, provided for, accepted.

NELLIE. What! Countries like—like ours?

WOMAN. Oh, some countries are quite polite about it! It's not exactly recognised; but winked at. Especially where there are great armies of soldiers.

NELLIE. But what have they to say about it? How can they justify such a thing?

WOMAN. Oh, there are always words, philosophies . . . .

NELLIE. What possible words, what possible philosophy can justify a nameless horror like this?

WOMAN. Oh, it has a name. Philosophy, which argued away the name of God and gave a clod of mud for Man, has found a name for it right enough.

NELLIE. A name? For this? What is it?

WOMAN. The Necessary Evil.

NELLIE. Oh, but what blasphemy! Evil . . . . necessary?

WOMAN. Necessary. That's what they say.

FRANK *is going to put an end to this. He gathers himself up for violent assault. He is purple with rage.*

The two women are still in the middle. The following dialogue between the two men is hurled across them from one side of the room to the other.

FRANK. And so it is necessary. *This* evil. Nellie, you don't understand—you're a woman. But Father's a man: he *must* understand: he can't be such a born blind . . . . Father! Listen to me. You must listen to me. Are we to stand here, and let these women . . . . My God! It's unbearable! Unthinkable! My own sister . . . .

HERON. Go on, my boy, I'm listening. Listening very intently.

FRANK. *You* know what a man's life is, Father. You . . . . You must have . . . . sometimes in your life . . . . You . . . . Damn it, you must know what it is to have to be a man!

HERON. Yes, that's true. I know something about that.

FRANK. And life isn't such a damnably easy thing, all said and done.

HERON. Yes, I know something about that, too.

FRANK. Very well then. We don't like it—afterwards. We don't love ourselves for it, do we? We didn't make ourselves. *We* didn't invent our beastly passions. After all, God made us: at least I suppose He did. We're told He did. He's the one to . . . .

HERON. Take care, my boy. Don't add blasphemy to the rest of it.

FRANK. Blasphemy be . . . .

He loses his head more and more as he proceeds;

Besides, who is going to accept the statements of a woman like this? I tell you, I'm sick of all this pious talk and snivelling and sentimentality about man's sin and woman's degradation and the rest of it. Some of these women choose the life: they like it: they do it wilfully with their eyes open. Fifty per cent of them. More. They were born that way: intended for it: *they* don't know anything of all the high talk and prophetic piffle this woman has been treating us to, I can tell you! They come to you, dozens of them, brazenly, openly, and . . . . Well, I could tell you some pretty tales about them, if I wanted to; but I won't! . . . .

HERON. No: I think perhaps you'd better not.

FRANK. It's they, the women, these women, who nearly always make the first overtures. We'd get on all right, if there weren't any damned women in the world. It's like Adam and Eve in the Bible. After all, I believe what my Bible tells me: "The woman did tempt me, and I did eat."

HERON. Your unanimity with Adam does you both credit.

FRANK. And as for their blessed whining about their poverty and their childless lives and their outcast this and their shunned the other . . . .

HERON. I see, it destroys everything. Not only honor, truth, manliness. It makes you unpitiful, too.

FRANK (*fiercely*). What does?

HERON (*more fiercely*). Lust! Man's lust!

FRANK *goes all to pieces, sputtering:*

FRANK. Oh, but Father, it's different with you . . . . You don't know what it is! You're not like the rest of us! You're not like other men.

HERON. Am I not? Do I look like a weakling?

FRANK. No, but you were born different. Pure, innocent, simple—call it what you like. And then, too, your quiet pottering sort of life down here: your occupations . . . . You can't imagine, you can't begin to imagine what temptation of this sort is to other men.

HERON. Yes. I've had that told me before—by men, down at the club. Club men! They've come to me, slopping with leers and with whiskey, and told me I was different! Born different! Made of some other stuff. Men with pale faces, loose lips, and a certain lurid wolf-look in the eye, red rims to them; or else the other sort—the sort with blotches: *they* have told me that. *Me!* Me with my crimson blood, clear head, clean liver, and a heart thumping like a steam-hammer! I can't imagine, can't I? Look at me! Damn you, look at me! Do I look as if I can't imagine?

FRANK *does not answer this point.*

Don't you make any mistake about it, my boy. I know all about it. I know everything that these men of the world know. But I know something else as well.

FRANK. Well, what's that?

HERON. Something they would laugh at: something hideously funny to men of the world!

FRANK. Well, well, what is it?

HERON. That there is a Man in this world—a Real Man, an Alive Man—Who is the power unto salvation from sin.

FRANK. Isn't that a little old-fashioned, Father?

HERON. Just a few thousand years, yes: I hope so.

FRANK. You won't find people agreeing with you.

HERON. They'll have to, or be damned.

FRANK. After all, even the churches aren't so severe as you. They're coming up to date on this point as on all the others.

HERON. Let them. They'll crumble into ruin the sooner, and give *God's* Church a chance.

FRANK. But the scientists, the philosophers, the great thinkers of the age—they're nearly all of them against you.

HERON. Oh, to hell with *them!*

FRANK. But there's not a book you can take up, not a play you can go and see, the whole of modern literature, music, art—they have all decided on my side. Look here, Father, *you're* a musician. *You* ought to understand. After all, Art means something, doesn't it?

HERON. Don't you talk to me about Art! I'm an artist. I know all about Art! Oh, I know I'm unsuccessful, not known—that sort of success in these days you can share with pills and newspaper editors and politicians—and it's true, I've only published one trumpery bit of a song, and am as vain as a peacock about that; but I am an artist, all the same. God's flame burns in me, too; and the people I *do* reach, just the few of them, here in this little tin-pot of a place—aye, and beyond it, too—they know it! Nay, I'll prophesy: they shall know it in all nations, down the ages, after today! . . . . And I tell you now, we're going to alter all this modern cackle and moon-calf worship of the bawdy bestiality they are calling Art! Yes, I—I—I, and the people like me! We are going to have the Real Thing here presently. Don't you think these filthmongers are going to have it all their own way. Not whilst we're here! The Real Thing, like the Kingdom of Heaven, is upon us! The Thing that Bach and Beethoven and Brahms stood for: the

Thing that gave us Shakespeare and Euripides and Sophocles and mighty Aeschylus: the Thing that tells us the truth about God and life and human destinies and all the imperishables in the kingdom of our everlasting souls. And I'm part of it! . . . .

Art! You call it Art! The dirty spewings and indecencies, the greasy lusts, the back-stair adulteries, abortions, and abominations of a pack of beastly decadents! It's going to be altered, I tell you; and soon. We're going to clean out this cesspool before long. And until then, let there be at least one artist to stand up in all this world of liars, and flout it in the face!

FRANK. Meaning yourself, I suppose.

HERON. You know whom I mean. Whether it's I, or somebody else, doesn't very much matter. I've told you my opinion of these others; and I hope they'll get to know about it.

FRANK. All the same, I don't see that this has to do with the problem we are discussing.

HERON. Hasn't it? Look into it deeply, and you'll find it has. If Religion and Art conspire in lying, how is the world ever going to be saved?

FRANK. Saved! Who's talking about saving? Father, I do wish you'd stow this evangelical clap-trap!

HERON. Do you find the world so beautiful then, that you think it doesn't need it?

FRANK. Oh, curse the world! Curse religion! Curse art! They've nothing whatever to do with it. It's the way a man's made. Our disgusting bodies.

HERON. Don't call them disgusting. Mine's not disgusting. They're very beautiful—our bodies.

FRANK. I call them beastly.

He hesitates a moment: then bursts out again:

Look here, Father, you can preach away at me as you please, but what I say is this: There isn't a man in the world who isn't implicated somehow in this problem. It's natural. It touches everyone of us. If not in deed, then in word: if not in word, then in thought. There's not a man living who is really clean.

HERON. You're a liar, my boy: I am. Many men are. Millions of them. But they don't always write books or plays.

FRANK. Oh, all right, if I'm a liar . . . .

He makes to move away, but returns for one last attack:

Good God! How do they manage it? What do they do? What's their secret?

HERON. Abstinence, prayer, clean habits, a busy life, zest in the world, self-reverence, reverence for God, for others, the worship of woman, and—pity. God does the rest.

FRANK *remains silent at last.*

And now, let me ask *you*—one thing. What leprous poison was it in your heart, made you take up this stand today?

FRANK. Oh, it doesn't matter.

He turns away, and leans heavily against the mantlepiece.

HERON. I'd like to hear, my boy. Tell me.

But he remains silent.

Frank. Didn't you hear me?

FRANK. Yes, I heard you, all right.

HERON. Then, what was it?

FRANK (*in a low voice, his back still toward his father*). What's the use? You know well enough, without my telling you.

HERON. My boy, I'm waiting. And God knows, I love you.

The boy turns, facing his father, a despairing wildness in his eyes;

FRANK. Father . . . . against Heaven and before you . . . . and am no more worthy . . . . no more worthy . . . .

He sinks into the armchair, broken, burying his face in his hands.

His father goes to him.

NELLIE *is sitting in the chair, left of the table. The* WOMAN *has been standing, motionless, all the time.*

There is a long silence, broken at last by the voice of the WOMAN:

WOMAN. This, then, was what I had to say. My message to you from the underworld. Remember, I am the voice of millions, dead and alive: the voice perhaps of millions yet unborn. Nay, I am more: I am your mother: it may be—even—God. And now I am going to ask you just one thing. I would like to put this question to you and to every young girl in the world.

NELLIE. What is it?

WOMAN. What are you going to do about it?

Nellie. I don't know. I am in darkness. Tell me.

Woman. I will. First then, your innocence. Cherish it, keep it unspotted—within, mind you, deep within; and let it grow. Seek wisdom and understanding with it. Don't be content any longer to be babies, playthings, dreaming dolls. Grow up. Learn to be.

Next: save your men. The men around you, the men you have to do with, everyone of them. Even the worst.

Nellie. Yes, but how?

Woman. Let them know what women are.

Nellie. Oh, I see: I begin to understand.

Woman. Then, when the time comes, *marry*. Refuse to be *married*. Don't let them give you away in darkness. Marry in daylight. Ask: ascertain: don't be put off with lies. And one thing, above all: don't marry an unclean man. Help, pity, if you can; but don't marry him. Don't foul your precious body: it isn't your own: don't hand on unclean blood to your children. Remember, thou shalt do no murder—body or soul.

Nellie. Oh, but I could never think of marrying. It seems to me as if marriage could never look beautiful again.

Woman. Ask him.

She points to John Heron.

Nellie. Oh, Father! . . . .

Heron. My child, marriage is God's also. It is His sacrament. But the grace of it must be striven for, attained: like saintliness, like—like any other work of art. The true marriages of the world do not drop down from Heaven, ready made: they come in dream, in vision, to the seeking soul: they call for sacrifice, for will, for effort: they must be labored for, if you want them here on earth. Like religion: like social order: like art.

WOMAN. And last: one last thing for pity's sake I beg you . . . .

NELLIE. Go on. I will.

WOMAN. Reach down the lily whiteness of your gentle hands, and lift us from the mire.

> NELLIE *kisses her. The* WOMAN *becomes beautiful like something sanctified.*

And now, good-bye.

> *She is about to put on her hat, when* NELLIE *cries out in an agony of tenderness:*

NELLIE. Oh, what was it, what power from God was it, that drew my heart to yours? Why should I be chosen for such a tenderness as this?

WOMAN. Because of God's greatest miracle of loveliness on earth.

NELLIE. Because of what? What loveliness?

WOMAN. Because of your innocence—your white soul. And then also, you are my child. Not only his: not only your mother's; but mine: everybody's: the world's. Yes, you shall be that henceforward, down the days . . . .

And that is why you have had to hear this terrible thing.

> *She puts on her hat, mechanically, her eyes still fixed on the girl.*

Good-bye. I shall remember you.

IE. I cannot speak. I am dumb. I don't know how
e you: how to think of you . . . .

AN. Think of me as of something dead and buried.
s risen again, or rising . . . . Who knows? Good-

She goes out softly. Shortly after, the street door is heard closing quietly behind her.

NELLIE *wakes from a kind of stupor, and makes a movement toward the door.*

ON. Where are you going, Nellie?

IE. Up there. To my little room. I want to speak
eone. It's Someone, I don't think I've ever spoken
e.

ON. Whom?

IE. The Mother of God.

She goes out, a strange new thought in her mind. There is silence in the room for a short space. Nothing is heard but the ticking of the clock in the corner. Then FRANK *rises from the armchair, where he has been sitting with his face buried in his hands all this time.*

K. Father, I'm going back again tonight. I'm
d. I can't stay here, now.

He goes up the room, puts on his coat, and gets his hat and bag.

rite to you tomorrow.

ON. Do, Frank.

They join hands for a moment. FRANK *goes to the door, hesitates, and turns;*

FRANK. Oh, I feel like a beast, a brute beast: man of me turned into a beast.

HERON. Well, that's as it should be, my boy. Y a beast may be made the beginning of a man.

FRANK. But what can I do? What can a fellow has once . . . . A fellow like me?

HERON. Repent. Cleanse your ways. Turn to G

FRANK *bows his head and goes out.*

JOHN HERON *stands thinking. Then he the fireplace and lights his pipe; turns room and looks at his wife's portrait; re the table and blows out the guttering Pauses, irresolute; and then goes over piano; sits down and relieves his agony o by finishing the Intermezzo from the poi he left off.*

On the very last note the curtain falls. end of the play.

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